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The Spirit at Work: Student Affairs Practitioners and Spiritual Identity

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The Spirit at Work: Student Affairs Practitioners and Spiritual Identity

by

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Abstract

While scholarly research has documented an increased interest in spirituality by college students and investigated the way spirituality influences faculty and students of various worldviews, research had yet to extensively examine the spirituality of student affairs practitioners. Accordingly, this study sought to understand the factors that influence how student affairs practitioners live out spiritual authenticity at work, including in their conversations with students.

The study was based on a qualitative research design, including semi-structured interviews with ten student affairs practitioners working in public higher education in a Midwestern state, and the spiritual development theories of James Fowler and Sharon Daloz Parks. The following research questions informed this study: How do student affairs practitioners integrate spirituality into their work? To what extent do student affairs practitioners feel they bring their authentic self to work? What factors influence student affairs practitioners' conversations with students regarding spirituality?

The study suggested student affairs practitioners' spiritual identity at work is complex and influenced by many factors. Likewise, societal, institutional, professional, and personal issues create challenges for having spiritual conversations with students.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In addition to intellectual growth, personal development has always been within the mission of American Higher Education institutions (Boyer, 1987; Marsden, 1994). From the colonial colleges, founded by Christian denominations, to modern multiple-use spaces hosting interfaith programming, colleges and universities helped students identify their values and beliefs (Parks, 2011), although the role of religion in public higher education has fluctuated throughout the centuries (Felix & Bowman, 2015; Thelin, 2011). Currently, while a place for spirituality is understood at private, faith-based colleges, it is often less visible in secular institutions, even as students are expressing a renewed interest in exploring their spiritual identity (Lindholm, 2014).

Nash and Murray (2010) contended that in the 21st century, religio-spiritual identity is the core identity of billions of people and is the primary way of making meaning for at least two-thirds of the world's inhabitants, as "The quest for meaning lies at the heart of all cultures, peoples, and professions. We believe strongly that the quest for meaning in life is what a genuine liberal education should be about" (p. 60). Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) concurred:

> . . . religion is inextricably blended into the key dispositions that drive learning itself—the mixing of critical thinking with hope, the awareness of difference, the ability to wonder and to see the world in new ways, the skill of focusing on one thing at a time, and the blending of the personal with the impersonal. (p. 5)

Jacobson and Jacobson (2012) further explained there is a fundamental place for religion and spirituality in higher education. "It has too much power to be ignored, and it is too enmeshed in life to be treated as irrelevant to the choices people make and the ways in which societies organize themselves" (p. 6).

The importance of religion is evident in today's headlines. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and resulting tensions with Muslims, was a wake-up call that religious identity matters. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestinians, the Syrian Uprising, and Evangelical voters in the 2016 presidential election are stark reminders that religion impacts the lives of individuals and nations. The United States, as a religiously diverse nation (Pew Research Institute, 2016), struggles find understanding and acceptance for the increasing number of citizens who claim a faith background other than Christianity, including those who adhere to no tradition (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

Higher education is called to be a part of these conversations as diverse students make sense of this complex world and seek to find their place in it (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Nash & Murray, 2010). A growing number of students in American colleges and universities come with beliefs and practices often not acknowledged in policies, programs, and personnel at institutions that differ on what freedom of religion means in the life of academia (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Nash & Murray, 2010).

Spirituality and Higher Education

The first American higher education institutions were founded by Christian denominations to educate clergy, provide professional training, settle the frontier, and maintain sectarian interests (Thelin, 2011). Students' moral and religious lives were viewed as vital as intellectual development (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education [NASPA], 1987). But the rise of the German University model in the 1800s and the resulting fragmentation of higher education into colleges, disciplines, and departments relegated moral development to a singular subject rather than an overarching mission at most institutions (NASPA, 1987; Thelin,

2011). Keeling (2006) acknowledged "Historically, our educational practice has emphasized information transfer without much thought given to meaning, pertinence, or application of information in the context of a student's life" (p. 10). During the 1950s and 1960s, students' interest in religion declined and most institutions discontinued overt denominational support. Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006) observed that from this time, higher education institutions "have been oddly very silent about the roles of spirituality and religion in the lives of students" (p. 148). The past 20 years has seen a renewed interest in spirituality on campus (Small, 2015) as institutions realize religion has the potential to enhance student learning and to improve higher education (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

Student Affairs in Higher Education

While faculty in the founding colleges taught students both inside and outside the classroom, as institutions increased in complexity and the student body diversified, professions devoted solely to the co-curricular aspects of college life were created (Coomes & Gerda, 2016; Thelin, 2011), beginning with Deans of Men and Deans of Women (Chickering et al., 2006). In the early 1900s, these deans founded an organization to share knowledge and define the expanding profession (Thelin, 2011). Foundational student affairs documents profess a commitment to holistic student development, including the spiritual, as a centerpiece of their work (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949). In the 21st century, interest in spiritual issues ignited a renewed focus by student affairs researchers and practitioners (Schmalzbauer, 2013). Spirituality, faith, religion, and meaning-making have become frequent topics in student affairs literature (Small, 2015). But some have questioned if, and to what extent, spirituality is

being incorporated into student affairs practice (Astin et al., 2011; Nash & Murray, 2010; Small, 2015).

While several studies have examined the relationship between faculty and students regarding spirituality (Gross & Simmons, 2009; Lindholm, 2014), scant attention has been paid to the spirituality of student affairs practitioners and their work with students around spiritual development (Kiessling, 2010). Robinson and Glanzer (2016) studied students' expectations related to life purpose, including conversations with faculty, but excluded student affairs. Since student affairs professionals often serve as mentors for college students, this gap in the research deserves attention (Parks, 2011).

Student Development Theories Related to Spirituality

This study is informed by several developmental theories which explain students' transition during the college years. The lenses they create are introduced below.

Erikson espoused an eight-stage lifespan theory. His fifth stage, Identity versus Identity Diffusion (Confusion) includes the traditional college years (Parks, 1986). Piaget believed as individuals interact with their environment, they develop "increasingly complex structures (or capabilities) to receive, compose and know their world" (Parks, 1986, p. 33). Kegan, inspired by Piaget's theory, stated individuals made sense of their lives through struggle (Parks, 1986). Perry's Ethical and Intellectual Development model claims significant growth occurs during the college years (Perry, 1999). Kohlberg's moral stage development theory hypothesizes a strong connection between moral and cognitive development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Gilligan added a relational focus to understanding maturation (Evans et al., 2010). In summary, these theorists created an understanding of individuals as they moved through the

critical developmental tasks of emerging adulthood (Parks, 1986; Patton, Renn, Guido & Quayle, 2016).

Building on this foundation, theorists created frameworks specifically for understanding spiritual development. Fowler, who "has most comprehensively and effectively pioneered the interdisciplinary study of the relationship between developmental psychologies and faith" (Parks, 1986, p. 40), is credited with being the first to examine spiritual development. Parks, a student of Fowler, described her theory as "standing within and critically elaborating on" Fowler's framework, but focused on the big questions of emerging adulthood (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 57). Fowler and Parks are often cited as essential theorists in faith development (Patton et al., 2016). More recently, Small (2008, 2011, 2015) introduced a social justice lens to college student spirituality.

Park's (1986, 2000, 2011) theory of spiritual development during emerging adulthood will form the theoretical framework of this study. Emerging adulthood, encompassing the ages of 18-25 (Parks, 1986, 2000, 2011; Settersten & Ray, 2010), brings a myriad of major life decisions, growth, and transitions. It is during emerging adulthood that college students explore relationships, form identities, make vocational choices, and create the foundation of their adult lives. Parks (2011) claimed "Emerging adulthood is a distinctively vital time for the formation of the kind of critically aware faith that undergirds the trust, agency, sense of belonging, respect, compassion, intelligence, and confidence required for citizenship and leadership in today's society" (p. xi). Specifically, students are faced with their emerging hopes and dreams, educational challenges, spiritual formation, career exploration, evolving relationships, and identity development (Nash & Murray, 2010).

Several authors have stressed the importance of college faculty and student affairs practitioners in guiding students along the journey to adulthood (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Nash & Murray 2010; Parks, 2011). Some contend that young adults cannot find their way through their emerging self without the assistance of a "mentoring community" (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Love, 2002; Parks, 2000, 2011). This community can be comprised of individual mentors, peer or social groups, or a "network of belonging" (Parks, 2000, p. 95), and student affairs practitioners are often an integral member of that community (Parks, 2011).

Spirituality and College Students

Today's college students face many challenges, including mental health issues, complex relationships, identity development, and vocational choices (Nash & Murray, 2010). Several research studies have explored the role of spirituality as students manage these challenges (Astin et al., 2011, Small, 2011).

While colleges and universities support students' intellectual growth, Nash and Murray (2010) broaden that mission to include spiritual development, acknowledging

> As students flock to campuses across the nation, they bring with them intellectual and personal capacities which they hope their educators will help unlock, expand, and perfect. Students also bring with them their religio-spiritual ways of seeing the world and making meaning of it. To engage the whole-student education is also to engage the religio-spiritual dimension as well as the intellectual and the social. (p. 82)

As mentioned previously, a plethora of researchers have studied college students' search for meaning, under the frame of religious belief and practices, spirituality, faith, or life purpose (Astin et al., 2011; Lindholm, 2014; Small 2011). A five-year study by the Spirituality in Higher

Education Project (SHEP) led by Astin et al. (2011) reported four in five students "have an interest in spirituality" and more than four-fifths believe in God (p. 3). The authors concluded most college students are searching for deeper meaning in their lives. Others asserted students are looking to higher education institutions to help them find meaning (Nash & Murray, 2010). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), in their comprehensive review of higher education research, noted that college students had a declining identification with traditional religion but did express a strong interest in spirituality, leading them to conclude that students do not reject religion, but rather redefine, personalize, and internalize their beliefs in college. Other researchers have asserted a non-Christian worldview can negatively affect a student's college experience (Bowman & Small, 2013; Small, 2011, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

While recent studies have examined student religiosity and the beliefs of college faculty, student affairs practitioners have been the subject of limited research. Of those studies, individual conversations and mentoring by practitioners regarding spiritual topics has received scant attention. There exists a gap in the literature of the beliefs and practices of student affairs practitioners as to how they integrate spirituality into their work (Kiessling, 2010). This study is important as many college students indicate an interest in spiritual development during emerging adulthood (Astin et al., 2011). The extent and ways that aspiration is being realized on campuses today is worth exploration because a core mission of student affairs practitioners is to encourage holistic student development (American Council of Education, 1937, 1949).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The overall purpose of this study is to offer preliminary insights into the spirituality of student affairs practitioners and how it informs their work, including conversations with individual students. The study is timely due to the limited empirical research on student affairs practitioners in previous research on spirituality (Small, 2015). This study seeks to understand how student affairs practitioners define and make sense of their spirituality, and how they bring their authentic self to their work environment. While the literature discusses the interest of college students in spirituality (Astin et al., 2011), faculty involvement in student spirituality (Lindholm, 2014) and various programs and initiatives higher education institutions have enacted to support student spirituality (Locet & Stewart 2011; Patel, 2016), it has been relatively silent regarding the role of student affairs practitioners, especially through the lens of their conversations with students. Through the study findings, a deeper understanding of the current context for spiritual conversations with students will be explored and provide a basis to make recommendations for individual student affairs practitioners, departments, and institutions to strengthen their engagement with students related to spirituality. Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings of this study may result in the development of policies, programs, and initiatives to guide practitioners in increasing their skills and competence, as well as providing a springboard for further research on spirituality.

This study is based on the researcher's experience of observing students struggle with legal issues, the death of a family member or friend, acceptance that their long-held dreams will not be realized, the end of relationships and the deep questions of who they are as they discover their place in the world. The crisis of depression, anxiety and ultimately, suicidal behavior, along

with other mental health concerns speak to the ways in which many students struggle to cope with the demands of a complex life (Astin et al., 2011). Even those who can avoid the pitfalls mentioned above discover that creating a spiritual identity during emerging adulthood is rarely easy (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Parks, 2011).

This study will explore if, and how, student affairs practitioners embrace a mentoring role in the spiritual identity development of students. It will seek to examine multiple perspectives of this topic, including the implicit and explicit expectations of student affairs practitioners for how their spiritual beliefs manifest in their work, including conversations with students.

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do student affairs practitioners integrate spirituality into their work?
2. To what extent do student affairs practitioners bring their authentic self to work?
3. What factors influence student affairs practitioners' conversations with students regarding spirituality?

Definition of Key Terms

For this study, the following definitions will be used:

Faith-Parks (2011) defined faith as "the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience" (p. x).

Holistic Student Development-the relationship between the "intellectual, moral, social, faith, and spiritual aspects of student development and how students develop within campus and societal contexts" (Trautvetter, 2007, p. 238).

Meaning Making-Nash and Murray (2010) stated "those interpretations, narrative frameworks, philosophical rationales and perspectives, and faith or belief systems that each of us brings to the various worlds in which we live, love, learn, work, and worship" (p. xx).

Religion- faith-based beliefs, doctrinal standards, and traditional convictions which are practiced by members in a community of believers (Astin et al., 2011; Nash & Murray, 2010; Trautvetter, 2007).

Spirituality- is "our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here-the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to one another and to the world around us" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 4).

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the historical connection between spirituality and higher education. In the twenty first century, students are searching to develop a spiritual identity and are expecting their college experience, including their relationship with student affairs practitioners, to assist in that process. Student affairs as a profession has long asserted that its aim is to provide holistic student development; however, spiritual identity has received less attention than other forms of identity such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. Theoretical frameworks provide a way to explore college student spiritual identity.

Chapter II provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and theoretical framework for the study. Specifically, the following areas form the basis for a thorough review of the relevant research literature; an exploration of terminology, the history of spirituality and higher education, the role of student affairs practitioners, the foundation of spiritual development theory, and college student spirituality.

The specific qualitative methodology and methods used for this study will be addressed in Chapter III. This includes a description of the population, sample selection, data collection methods, data analysis, the trustworthiness of the study, and the bias of the researcher.

Chapter IV provides an analysis of the data and findings. The first section introduces the participants and shares raw data from the interviews. The second half of the chapter will report the study findings.

To conclude the study, Chapter V will discuss the findings in relation to the research questions. The limitations of the study are addressed. Recommendations for future research and practice are provided. Concluding remarks will be offered.

Spirituality in higher education is worthy of consideration as student affairs practitioners seek to holistically mentor students. Boyer (1997) remarked, "today we are rediscovering that the sense of the sacred in inextricably interwoven with the most basic of human impulses . . . it's simply impossible to be a well-educated person without exploring how religion has shaped the human story" (p. 121). Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) emphasized:

> Paying attention to religion in higher education today is not at all a matter of imposing faith or morality on anyone; it is a matter of responding intelligently to the questions of life that students find themselves necessarily asking as they try to make sense of themselves and the world in an era of ever-increasing social, intellectual and religious complexity. (p. 2)

Chapter II: Literature Review

Chapter I presented the case for why spirituality in higher education, specifically the work of student affairs practitioners, is worthy of study. In this chapter, a further exploration of study terms, the history of spirituality in American higher education, the role of student affairs, the theoretical framework for the study and characteristics of college students will be examined to ground the study in the literature.

Terms for the Study

One of the challenges of this study is to define key terms from the relevant literature. Fontana and Prokos (2007) contended "The use of language, particularly the use of specific terms, is important to create a 'sharedness of meanings'" (p. 71). Terms are important because they "focus the definition while avoiding narrow characterizations that exclude or privilege certain groups" (Rockenbach, Mayhew, Davidson, Ofstein, & Clark Bush, 2015, p. 2).

Religion and Spirituality

Consistent definitions of terms have not found widespread acceptance (McNamara & Abo-Zena, 2014; Patton et al., 2016; Siner, 2015). An initial review of the literature found religion (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012) or spirituality (Astin et al., 2011) as the most common words to define belief systems, but faith (Baxter Magolda, 2009), meaning-making (Parks, 2011), purpose (Parks, 2011), philosophy of life (Astin, 1993), values (Small, 2015), vocation (Dahlstrand, 2010), and citizenship (Trautvetter, 2007) have also been used. Each term has a slightly different meaning, as determined by the author and the context of the work.

Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) chose to use the term religion in their work, defining it as how individuals

> understand the world and order their lives in light of what they believe to be ultimately true, real, and important. Religion in this sense of the term includes all the ideas, values, rituals, and affections that people reference when they are focusing on 'things that really matter.' (p. 14)

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in religious matters, but spirituality is the term more commonly used (Mayrl & Oeur, 2009) and is resonating with today's college student (Astin et al., 2011). Teasdale (1999) stated "Being spiritual suggests personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality...and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging" (pp. 17-18). Parks (2008) expressed:

> When we speak of the human being as a spiritual being, we acknowledge an animating essence at the core of our lives-our experience of awe and wonder and our capacity to be moved, vulnerable, compassionate, loyal, tender, loving, insightful, excited, curious, engaged and sometimes outraged. (p. 4)

Waggoner (2016) detailed two trends to explain why spirituality better describes the belief systems of college students. First, is a growing disenchantment with traditional religions and their ability to provide guidance for modern society. Second, spirituality promotes self-care and personal fulfillment, which resonate with today's youth.

Other Terms

Nash and Murray (2010) referred to religion and spirituality as religio-spiritual because they feel they cannot separate one from the other. McNamara and Abo-Zena (2014), however, explained that religion "encompasses organized and institutional aspects and is best represented by individual beliefs and practices" (p. 312), whereas spirituality encompasses personal and

transcendent aspects. Others argued that religion and spirituality still exclude many of the ways college students experience meaning. Fairchild (2009) used Existentialism to represent students who do not believe in a higher power. Nash and Murray (2010) claimed:

> Some students will look to religion and spirituality for transcendent meaning; others will look to politics or human service careers for secular meaning. Still others will look to friendships and intimate relationships for intrinsic meaning, or to the creative arts, science, and the natural environment for extrinsic meaning. And still others will commit themselves to a variety of social justice issues in order to create activistic forms of meaning. (p. xxiii)

Parks (2011) chose faith and meaning-making in her work on emerging adult spiritual development. Parks (1986) asserted that the terms faith and meaning-making "levels the playing field" for all students who have big questions, whether they identify as religious, spiritual or secular. Meaning-making is a lens through which we can recognize the spiritual aspects of human experience (Schwartz, 2007). Parks (2000) asserted that meaning-making is a "search for a sense of connection, pattern, order, and significance . . . it is a way to understand our experience that makes sense of both the expected and unexpected . . . " (p. 14).

Spirituality

For the purposes of this study, the term spirituality will be used, with the understanding that it encompasses a broad framework including cultural traditions and general moral perspectives in addition to established religions.

> More and more people are cobbling together their own unique combinations of religious ideas, practices, experiences, and core values from a variety of religious and nonreligious

> sources. To be spiritual, understood in this sense, is to have deeply held convictions, and anyone can have those kinds of heartfelt allegiances. (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 7)

Some authors (Astin et al., 2011; Patton et al., 2016) have separated the inner aspects of spirituality as contrasted to outward practice. Others have noted that there is a corporate or group aspect, in addition to individual beliefs and practice (Patton et al., 2016).

Love and Talbot (1999) defined spirituality as having five core elements:

- Seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness;
- Transcending one's current locus of centricity (moving beyond the primary sphere or focal point of one's life);
- Developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and community;
- Deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in life;
- Becoming increasingly open to exploring a relationship with intangible powers beyond human existence and knowing. (pp. 617-620)

The most comprehensive operational definition of spirituality was developed as part of the Spirituality in Higher Education study (Astin et al., 2011). It uses a multidimensional definition which consists of five measures:

- Equanimity, which includes the ability to find meaning in times of hardship, feeling at peace or centered, seeing each day as a gift and feeling good about the direction of life;

- Spiritual quest, or the act of searching for meaning and purpose in life, becoming a more self-aware and enlightened person and finding answers to life's mysteries and "big questions";
- Ethic of care, which encompasses the degree of care and concern about the welfare of others and the world;
- Charitable involvement, or behaviors such as participating in community service, donating money to charity and helping friends with personal problems;
- Ecumenical worldview, describing transcending ethnocentrism and egocentrism as demonstrated by interest in different religious traditions, seeking to understand other countries and cultures, feeling a strong connection to all humanity, believing in the goodness of all people, accepting others as they are and believing that all life is interconnected, and that love is at the root of all the great religions. (pp. 20-21)

Religion, meaning-making, faith, purpose, and vocation will appear in the cited literature. However, the author will use spirituality as defined above for this study to encompass both the formal aspects of religion, as well as more personal, individualized belief systems, including those of secular students. With an introduction to related terms and a determination that spirituality will be used for this study, an exploration of spirituality through the eras of higher education will be conducted. While not exhaustive, it provides a context for understanding the current place of spirituality in higher education.

History of Higher Education and Spirituality

From the inception of the first American colleges, spirituality has been intertwined in higher education (NASPA, 1987; Thelin, 2011; Waggoner, 2016). But, whether at the center of campus serving to unite students, administration, and faculty under common traditions, or on the fringe of campus life, spirituality has, and will continue to claim, a unique place. To understand this relationship, it is important to examine its historical context (Felix & Bowman, 2015). This review will examine the colonial colleges, the expansion of higher education, the German University model, the world wars, the sixties revolution, the introduction of multi-culturalism, and finally, the re-engagement of spirituality on campus.

The Colonial Colleges

The first American colleges, founded by Protestant denominations, served to train the next generation of clergy and educate the sons of the wealthy elite for positions of leadership (Dawsey, 2003; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Laurence, 1999; Lawrence, 2007; Nieli, 2007), to teach youth to be "wiser and more sensitive to their moral and ethical responsibilities" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 345) and to "pass on the moral, intellectual, and religious heritage of Christianity and Greco-Roman high culture to succeeding generations of the nation's youth" (Nieli, 2007, p. 312). All nine colleges founded prior to 1770 were actively involved in the spiritual development of students (Felix & Bowman, 2015). Protestantism dominated not only higher education, but also American society (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

Clergy who served as tutors lived with students, as they studied Christian works and the classic literature of Western Civilization together (Thelin, 2011). Knowledge was viewed as interconnected, so tutors taught numerous subjects from a unified perspective (Gross &

Simmons, 2009; Nieli, 2007). Mentoring was a natural fit for the small classes and student bodies of the early colleges. Character education was an integral part of the college experience, campus life was centered on daily, mandatory worship services and there was an expectation students' behavior would reflect the moral vision of the sponsoring denomination (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Nieli, 2007). The institution's president, likely a clergy member, taught the capstone course to launch students into their adult lives (Felix & Bowman, 2015; Seifert, 2015). At a time when most citizens attained few years of formal schooling, clergy were among the most educated members of the community (Lawrence, 2007). Therefore, a partnership with the church provided colleges with a "clear purpose, focus, and coherence" (Nieli, 2007, p. 313).

Higher Education Expands

As the United States grew during the mid-1800s, so did the need for postsecondary education. The number and size of colleges increased as more young adults utilized a college education to advance in a society that was increasingly urban and industrialized (Lawrence, 1999; Nieli, 2007). During this time, higher education also became secularized. Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) cited three reasons:

1. Protestantism divided into two camps; fundamentalism and modernism. Fundamentalists created religious colleges with liberal arts focus and denominational seminaries, while the modernists remained in traditional colleges (Lawrence, 2007).
2. Religion was marginalized as knowledge and became "fragmented and narrowed" in disciplines under the German University Model (Shahjahan, 2010).
3. Industrial philanthropists provided financial support for research-focused universities (Lawrence, 2007).

These factors led to vast changes in American higher education. They will be discussed in the next section.

The German University Model

One of the most dramatic changes in United States collegiate history began during the last half of the 19th century, when many academics studied at world-renowned German universities (Hill, 2011; Nieli, 2007). Unlike colonial colleges, which were based on the Oxford model, German institutions espoused a scientific, research-based knowledge framework (Thelin, 2011). Specialization through knowledge creation and dissemination took center stage (Gross & Simmons, 2009; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Nieli, 2007). Colleges distanced themselves from their religious affiliations and hence the curriculum, background of the faculty and the essential life of the institution no longer centered on Christian beliefs (Thelin, 2011). As institutions broadened their mission and created departments to categorize newly developed disciplines of science, religion was relegated to an area of study, rather than permeating the entire curriculum (Kaplan, 2006; Lawrence, 2007; Nieli, 2007; Schmalzbauer, 2013). Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012), explained:

> As more and more emphasis was placed on research and on new scientific discoveries, it became increasingly unclear where religion fit and what its proper role might be in terms of creating knowledge and building character. The eventual consensus was that religion really did not fit anywhere, and it was especially unfit for the classroom or laboratory. (p. 23)

Students who studied under the German model entered the American higher education faculty ranks with a rational, empirical, and scientific epistemology. The personal mentoring of Colonial

tutors gave way to professional faculty who presented lectures to large groups of students to maximize time for research (Lawrence, 2007; Thelin, 2011).

As curricular offerings grew, colleges lost the shared academic and religious courses which had provided cohesiveness to the students' collegiate experience. (Nieli, 2007) Colleges became factionalized as faculty and students increasingly focused on a specific academic discipline at the expense of a holistic education. This change mirrored American society, which was also becoming more complex and compartmentalized (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012), and while religion was still welcome in higher education, it was "to be dealt with by individuals on their own time or in dialogue with their religious communities, not within the teaching and research settings of the university" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 23).

Secularization. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 spawned not only numerous universities but increased the federal and state government's role in oversight and funding projects for the common good (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Thelin 2011). As a result, many institutions further distanced themselves from their religious heritage to attract diverse students and appeal to government and industry: entities that could offer financial resources (Lawrence 2007; Nieli, 2007; Thelin, 2011).

Mandatory religious services were replaced by secular-based admonitions for community service (Gross & Simmons, 2009), reflecting a societal change in which Protestantism was no longer the sole determiner of community values (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Increasingly, there was a sentiment that religion, whether in mission statements, campus practices, or academics, was a barrier to inclusivity (Lawrence, 2007).

Increasing industrialization created new partnerships between higher education and the companies that manufactured and distributed goods. As a result, colleges viewed industrial expertise, rather than character, as the criteria for employment (Gross & Simmons, 2009; Hill, 2011; Nieli, 2007). Administrations and Boards of Trustees counted fewer clergy among their ranks as the faculty, students, and curriculum secularized (Gross & Simmons, 2009; May, 1990; Thelin, 2011).

Diversification. Students sought a college education as a pathway to higher economic status. While a small percentage of the total college student population, women and Blacks were increasingly admitted. The first Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) began in church basements after the Civil War and paved the way for African Americans to obtain the college education previously denied them (Hawkins, 2012). A wave of immigration during the late 19th century and early 20th century initiated the first Catholic and Jewish colleges (Gross & Simmons, 2009; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Lawrence, 2007), which countered the discrimination these students had encountered in other American institutions (Thelin, 2011).

As the religious diversity of students increased, public colleges removed religious requirements and promoted inclusivity for all faiths (Thelin, 2011; Williams, 2003). Without a common moral core, students no longer had a homogenous religious identity to support their individual practices (Hill, 2011; Marsden, 1994).

World Wars

Prior to World War II, only 10% of the population attended college (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012), but higher education experienced one of its largest expansions following the war, with service members receiving tuition reimbursement and living expenses through the

Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, or the G.I. Bill (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Thelin, 2011). Those who benefitted from the G.I. Bill also envisioned a college education for their children (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

College was the path to obtain knowledge, and the church remained the domain of faith as matters of faith were unrelated to intellectual knowledge and especially to science, the dominant worldview (Lawrence, 2007). Although most colleges had a department of religion, it was far removed from the important work of the university (Thelin, 2011). Students sought a university education to secure a career and industry provided funding for research; religion was a part of neither (Lawrence, 2007). Specific religious language and commitments were replaced with general ideals of "freedom, democracy, benevolence, justice, reform, inclusiveness, brotherhood, and service" (Dawsey, 2003, p. 88).

The Cultural Revolution

By the latter half of the 20th century, higher education had largely replaced the term Christian with Judeo-Christian or Western Culture (Lawrence, 2007). Denominational colleges stated they were church-related, which often meant that "chapel was available, some courses in religion were offered, and the profits were morally respectable" (Lawrence, 2007, p. 259). For many of these colleges, the chapel in the middle of campus became the "largest, loveliest, and least utilized building on campus" (Edington, 2011, p. 2). Where once religion formed a common heritage and foundation for the institution, it was now only one of many equally valued perspectives taught and practiced (Thelin, 2011).

Religion became more distant from campus life as students no longer sought a denominational college experience, non-discrimination clauses were required to receive

government grants and career preparation rather than character formation became the primary purpose of a college education (Lawrence, 2007). Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) noted that "the move toward privatized religion accelerated during the 1960s, with religion becoming an almost exclusively personal concern on most campuses by the 1980s and 1990s" (p. 20). Academia began to envision how to educate young adults in values that were not absolute and religious-based; the rise of volunteerism and civic engagement reflected this transition (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

Waggoner (2016) cited trends that led to a decline of religion during the 1960s:

- Immigration by Eastern groups following the Immigration Act of 1965 introduced new religions to American culture;
- Several prominent theologians proclaimed that "God is dead" and religion no longer offered a credible way to conceptualize a moral life;
- New Age Spirituality offered an alternative to those disenfranchised by traditional religion;
- The Human Potential Movement, based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, took root in the form of a new focus on self and holistic health;
- An interest in exploring alternative ways of knowing in rejection of positivism and science emerged. (p. 148)

Finally, social unrest and upheaval challenged authority, including religious authority, creating a culture in which "inherited notions of social and religious authority could be cast aside and new pathways for being religious and nonreligious could be forged" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 27). One of those pathways was multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism

As the 20th century neared an end, Multiculturalism became the buzzword in higher education. No longer was mere tolerance acceptable. Chants of "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture's got to go" rang across campuses nationwide (Nieli, 2007). Where once a Western Civilization class was the destiny of every freshman student, "dead, white, western male" courses were supplemented with the perspectives of the underrepresented, oppressed, and marginalized (Nieli, 2007). Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) noted that the melting pot was beginning to be reflected in the higher education curriculum. Diversity increased, "making the privatization of 'personal' matters like religion the easy default position for maintaining civility on campus" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 25). Kessler (2000) noted that "Seeking a respectful way to deal with our differences, we educators turned away from matters of religion and spirituality" (p. xii). The later part of the 20th century also focused on materialism and outer markers of success. Young adults, desiring a high standard of living, began to "look out for number one" (Settersten & Ray, 2010).

Guided by Affirmative Action, colleges and universities sought to diversify their faculty and administrative ranks, employing greater numbers of women and minorities (Gross & Simmons, 2009). Denominational ministries declined as financial support dwindled and fewer students participated in their programs, but parachurches, associated with evangelical groups such as Campus Crusade for Christ, Intervarsity Fellowship, the Navigators, or Athletes in Action, became common (Schmalzbauer, 2013). Since these groups had a limited campus role, religion was "metaphorically swept under the rug at most colleges and universities, which tended

to operate on the assumption that religion was a purely personal concern that had little to do with higher education" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 5).

Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) noted three positions of religion on campus, from being central (the Protestant Era), marginal (the Privatized Era), and back to "newly relevant" (the Pluriform Era). The Protestant era began with Harvard College in 1636 and waned around 1900. The Privatization era encompassed most of the 20th century. During this time " . . . religion, although never entirely eliminated from higher education, was increasingly separated from the more public domains of teaching and research and was restricted to the private and academically invisible realm of personal opinion and informal conversation" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 16). The Pluriform era encompasses the renewal of spirituality and rise of religious pluralism over the past 15 years (Seifert, 2015).

Spiritual Re-engagement

Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) cited three factors which have contributed to a renewed interest in spirituality in American higher education. First, a growing acceptance of multiculturalism. Ethnic and women's studies championed multiple ways to experience the world, and alternative "ways of knowing", or postmodernism, became legitimized (Shahjahan, 2005). The acceptance of multiple truths reignited the value of individual experience. Scheitle (2011) found students viewed the truth of science and the truth of spirituality to be collaborative or interdependent, rather than conflicting. The second factor was the growth of professional studies, closely associated with human behavior. Since these disciplines have professional standards, ethics and morality were added to the curriculum. The last factor, an emphasis on student-centered learning, was a distinct philosophical shift from the faculty-centered teaching

which previously dominated higher education. Incorporating students' experiences became important as information became so extensive new ways to learn were needed (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). The subtle shift from the prominence of objective, rational truth to the legitimacy of the inner perspective created a space for students' spirituality (Dalton, 2011). Today, students expect their college experience to "help them think more clearly, feel more deeply, and consider more responsibly the broad questions of life" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 30).

But, Speck (2005) asserted that in some ways higher education is still in avoidance of spirituality, citing the belief that the state mandates separation of anything related to religion. Objectivity and rationality, which are difficult to correlate with spirituality, are still valued. Nash and Yang (2015) called on higher education to reimagine their mission to focus on a core purpose of educating students for lifelong growth as individuals, rather than the career focus that predominates most colleges today.

While there was not one specific event which renewed the emphasis on spirituality in higher education, a few are often credited as important. Palmer (1993) authored, *To Know as we are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey.* In 1996, the Education as Transformation Project examined how higher education was addressing religious diversity. In their study, 74% of college chaplains noted an increase in religious diversity, 39% reported an increase of religious groups on campus, and 26% said that students on campus were more interested in religious issues (Laurence, 1999). In 1998, Wellesley College hosted the Education as Transformation: Religious Pluralism, Spirituality and Higher Education conference, with 800 attendees from 350 institutions (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Love and Talbot (1999) authored the first peer

reviewed article on the spirituality of college students, which garnered widespread attention reminding student affairs practitioners of their commitment to development of the "whole" student (Waggoner, 2016). Between 1995 and 2005, there was a 22% increase in the number of college courses related to religion, and the number of religious studies majors rose by 40% (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012), further demonstrating that institutions were re-engaging with spirituality.

But while spirituality's visibility was increasing, it was far from being welcomed in all areas of the academy. Nash and Murray (2010) noted "Clearly, in our experience, there is an unmistakable secular bias on college campuses. Worse, on many nonsectarian campuses, there is outright disdain for those students who make and find meaning in their faith experiences" (p. 58). Lindholm (2014), in a national study of college faculty, 77% of respondents agreed campus life should contribute to students' personal and professional development, however 77% of public institution faculty disagreed spirituality should be included in that development.

Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) described four "trail markers" to describe how religion is currently being integrated on campuses:

1. Spirituality (versus religion), is preferred, being viewed as liberating, personal, and positive. Faculty and students increasingly identify more with spirituality (Astin et al., 2011; Lindholm, 2014).
2. Making the distinction that teaching *about* religion is a religiously neutral activity, whereas *teaching religion itself* is an exercise in indoctrination. However, it should be noted that students often blur that distinction (Nash & Murray, 2010).

3. The Difficult Dialogues approach, which promote interfaith conversations, where religious understanding can occur (Patel, 2016).
4. Big Questions. Everyone has big questions, whether they self-identify as "explicitly religious, nebulously spiritual, or thoroughly secular" (Parks, 2000, 2011, p. 45).

However, after accounting for the trail markers, Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) insisted: "Too much of the terrain where religion and higher education interact is left uncharted" (p. 45).

Of the 570 public, four-year Carnegie classified institutions, approximately half referenced spirituality among their resources, often through the Dean of Students office or in student organizations (Waggoner, 2016). But, the National Center for Student Engagement's National Survey of Student Engagement (2015) found that 27% of faculty who responded did not believe their institution was supportive of people based on their religious or spiritual views.

Higher education has a long tradition of addressing controversial issues and leading social change such as the civil rights movement, environmentalism, and multi-culturalism. Spirituality may be emerging as the next social justice issue in which colleges can voice support.

Summary of the Section

During the tenure of American higher education, religion has been a part of the college experience (Chickering et al., 2006). At times, the connection has been visible, strong and centered, as in the original colleges. Sometimes, the relationship has been tenuous at best, often contentious and always controversial as colleges and universities struggle to incorporate spirituality into the life of the institution in ways that honor the institutional mission, multiple perspectives of its students and the conversation of faith in the life of the academy (Jacobson & Jacobson, 2012). Parks (2008) recognized:

> While we do not typically speak this way within the academy, our deepest purposes include something far more profound than academic programs, conferring of degrees and credentials, or initiation into the disciplines and guilds of scholarship narrowly understood. We are agents of the formation of souls. (p. 7)

Student affairs has a unique history and role in the lives of college students, including their spiritual development. The next section will explore this relationship.

Student Affairs and Spirituality

Student affairs practitioners often interact with students who are seeking to make meaning of themselves and their world (Nash & Murray, 2010). Student affairs has historically espoused holistic student development, encompassing moral and ethical, inter and intrapersonal life skills along with cognitive growth (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949; Association of College Student Personnel, 2010; Patton et al., 2016). While the precise definition of educating the whole student has varied, spiritual or moral development has always been included (Mayrl & Oeur, 2009). Some have stated that spirituality does not have a place on campus at all, or belongs only in "the counseling center, or with campus ministry, or in a career services workshop" (Nash & Murray, 2010, p. xxviii). Shahjahan (2010) cited several reasons contributing to a lack of inclusion of spirituality in holistic student development, including fear of proselytizing, first amendment issues, fear of isolation or being labeled, and viewing spirituality as a Christian term. However, others argued that it is "clearly within the purview of student affairs staff to address spirituality on any number of fronts from wellness to residence hall programming" (Waggoner, 2016, p. 153). This section will examine the history of spirituality and student affairs, explore the role of student affairs, and determine how it is re-

engaging with spirituality. It continues with a discussion of related topics, namely, community, mentoring, conversation, transformational learning, and the separation of church and state as it impacts higher education.

The History of Student Affairs and Spirituality

In Loco Parentis, in place of parents, was a prominent concept in which college personnel were expected to fulfill the parental role for students. It declined with the rise of the German Model (Thelin, 2011). As faculty increasingly focused on research, Deans of Men and Deans of Women positions were created to meet students' co-curricular needs, including shepherding their general welfare and development (Thelin, 2011). Counselors, advisers, and admissions staff were added. Student affairs personnel offered religious training (Chickering et al., 2006). In the 1930s, the concept of meeting the holistic needs of students and an emphasis on making the most of the collegiate years led to the formalization of student affairs, including the creation of several foundational documents which exhorted the values and aims of the profession (ACE, 1937, 1949).

The Student Personnel Point of View, a pioneering statement published by the American Council on Education (ACE) (1937), declared the purpose of student affairs was to help a student reach "maximum effectiveness through clarification of his purposes . . . and through progression in religious, emotional and social development" (p. 4), and student affairs practitioners had an "obligation to consider the student as a whole . . . his moral and religious values" (p. 39), and the profession included "supervising, evaluating, and developing the religious life and interests of students" (p. 41).

In 1949, the American Council on Education affirmed student affairs should "include attention to the student's well-rounded development-physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually, as well intellectually" (np). The statement promoted the mentoring role of student affairs by noting "In his new search for values, which are worthy of personal allegiance in a time of social conflict, the student needs mature guidance" (ACE, 1949, p. 7).

A 50th anniversary commemoration of *The Student Personnel Point of View* jointly published by the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and the American Council on Education (1987) stated a student affairs practitioner should "Help students explore and clarify values" (p. 13), asserting it is "imperative that students learn to recognize, understand, and celebrate human differences" (p. 9). According to *The Student Personnel Point of View* (NASPA, 1987),colleges must help students with development tasks, including religious identity.

In the last decade of the 20th century, student affairs again turned attention to the "blind spot" of spiritual development in programming and services (Schmalzbauer, 2013). The call to re-engage is often credited to an article in the *NASPA Journal* by Love and Talbot (1999). Defining Spiritual Development: A Missing Consideration in Student Affairs, referenced the founding documents and called student affairs practitioners to again consider the whole student in their work.

The past 10-15 years have seen phenomenal growth in research and best practices related to the spirituality of college students (Small, 2015; Waggoner, 2016). Common programs for creating a spiritually inclusive campus, including "focused interfaith dialogue, community service projects, spirituality-themed living-learning communities, faculty-led discussions, book

clubs, film screenings and discussions" (Rockenbach et al., 2015, p. 8). Conferences, a research-based publication, *Journal of College and Character*, and a NASPA knowledge community have supported the role of spirituality in the context of a modern, inclusive university (Schmalzbauer, 2013). The mission of the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) (2019) Spirituality and Religion in Higher Education Knowledge Community (2017) is to "enhance and contribute to the conversations about spirituality in higher education across all types of post-secondary institutions." In 2009, College Student Educators International (ACPA) began what is now called the Commission for Spirituality, Faith, Religion, and Meaning (CSFRM), who, according to their mission statement, is an informed voice on spirituality and faith as they relate to student development. Tasks assigned the Commission are to conduct research and assessment, strengthen their professional competencies, and enrich their self-knowledge and professional knowledge related to spirituality (ACPA, 2019).

In a review of 2,500 research studies on college students, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found only two references to religion and no references to spirituality. One of the most influential and comprehensive research studies on college student spirituality was conducted by Alexander and Helen Astin (Astin & Astin, 2010), beginning in 1994 at the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). During the next seven years, their team conducted several nation-wide studies involving over 14,000 students on 136 campuses (Astin & Astin, 2010). Their initial work was followed by a study with Jennifer Lindholm, which explored the spiritual beliefs of 8,447 college faculty (Lindholm, 2014; Waggoner, 2016). As mentioned previously, neither of these seminal studies, however, explored the role of student affairs practitioners. Astin and Astin (2010) explained their interest in this topic:

> We became convinced that if we indeed cared about higher education and its impact on the education and development of our students, then we needed to learn much more about their spiritual journeys, and about how their spiritual life interfaces with other aspects of their academic life, personal development, and well-being. (p. 1)

ACPA and NASPA, the two primary student affairs professional organizations, identified core competencies for student affairs professionals. Their joint report (2010), entitled *Envisioning the Future of Student Affairs* claimed, "Helping our campus communities understand, respond to, and benefit from the diversity of all our students has often been a responsibility of student affairs" (p. 3). However, as classrooms increasingly engage in discussions about diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, students have not had similar conversations about diversity in belief systems (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Small, 2015).

Small (2015) identified three distinct periods in the 21st century regarding student affairs and spirituality: Initial Exploration, Urgent Focus, and Expanded Interest. Initial Exploration, from 1997 to 2001, began the "awakening" (p. 163). Works by Talbot and Love (1999) and Parks (2000) re-introduced college student spirituality in the student affairs profession. From 2002-2007, Urgent Focus began with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which brought to the forefront that religious differences needed to be addressed. During this time, Astin et al., (2011) laid the foundation for their landmark study of spirituality. Charitable foundations provided financial support for inquiries of spirituality on college campuses. Initial studies of Christian privilege and the intersectionality of identities were conducted. Spirituality-related research articles tripled, and student affairs professional organizations created sub-groups

dedicated to spirituality (Small, 2015). The current era, Expanded Interest, began in 2008, has been marked by a "deliberate, intentional commitment . . . sustained by the deep dedication of students, practitioners, and scholars" (Small, 2015, p. 166). This era has seen the development of student affairs practice through expanded campus programs, services, and spaces. Spirituality was enlarged to include atheist and agnostic students. Terms were more commonly defined and groups of students who followed various worldviews were studied.

However, not all agree the student affairs' profession has embraced the role of assisting students with development of their spiritual identity, although "student affairs staff were called upon to take leadership in creating and managing the out-of-class activities and experiences that would convey these moral values, beliefs, and behaviors" (Dalton & Crosby, 2012 p. 4). Outside of codes of conduct and procedures to address conduct violations, student affairs practitioners have often been reluctant to incorporate topics of morality into their work (Dalton & Crosby, 2012).

Spirituality in Student Affairs Documents

The Association of College Student Personnel (ACPA) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) (2015) collaborated to develop *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators*. The Personal and Ethical Foundations competency includes "thoughtful development, critique, and adherence to a holistic and comprehensive standard of ethics and commitment to one's own wellness and growth" through "curiosity, reflection, and self-authorship" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 12). A sub-set lists developing and articulating a personal set of beliefs as an essential component of this competency. Another sub-set states that having a comprehensive view of wellness, to include

spiritual elements, is essential for all practitioners. “Engaging in personal and spiritual exploration” is also included in these subsets (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 16). A foundational outcome is to have an awareness and understanding of one’s values and beliefs, as student affairs practitioners are called to “facilitate reflection to make meaning from experiences” when engaging with students (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 36). The Advising and Supporting competency encourage self-knowledge to advance “the holistic wellness of ourselves, our students, and our colleagues” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 15).

Wells (2015), in the latest edition of The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), developed standards of best practice for student affairs practitioners through articulating essential learning and development outcomes for six domains. The domain of knowledge acquisition, construction, integration and application, cites best practice as students personalizing their learning—to make meaning from their collegiate experiences. The intrapersonal development domain “integrates multiple aspects of identity into a coherent whole; recognizes and exhibits interdependence in accordance with environmental, cultural, and personal values; identities and commits to important aspects of self” (Wells, 2015, p. 26). Also, under intrapersonal development is the sub-category of spiritual awareness, which “develops and articulates personal belief system; understand roles of spirituality in personal and group values and behaviors; critiques, compares, and contrasts various belief systems; explores issues of purpose, meaning, and faith” (Wells, 2015, p. 26).

CAS standards for master’s level student affairs professional preparation programs include “extensive examination of theoretical perspectives that describe students’ growth in the areas of . . . spiritual development . . . .” (Wells, 2015, p. 349). In subsequent discussions,

spirituality joins other identities as an essential area for competence by student affairs practitioners. But as Chickering et al. (2006) noted, if faculty are not initiating conversations with graduate students about spirituality, it is not surprising students will not do so as practitioners.

Spirituality in Student Affairs Research and Practice

Discrepancy exists between the student affairs stated commitment to develop the whole student and actual practice. Student affairs has been at the forefront of assuring that the college experience is inclusive (Gray, 2010). But Rogers and Love (2007b) found that the majority of student affairs practitioners do not include spirituality in their work and in a complimentary study, that most student affairs graduate programs do not address spirituality (Rogers & Love, 2007a).

Spirituality in Graduate Preparation

Preparing student affairs practitioners to support students' spiritual development has been scantly researched (Rogers & Love, 2007a). In interviews with graduate student affairs faculty, Rogers and Love (2007a), reported none confidently affirmed to what degree their students would be able to address the spiritual needs of undergraduates. Therefore, a gap exists in the application of multi-culturally competent practice as it applies to the awareness, skills, and knowledge student affairs practitioners have on spirituality (Kocet & Stewart, 2011; Schmalzbauer, 2013). Despite guidance from professional organizations regarding the importance of spirituality in student affairs practice, a study by Rogers and Love (2007a) revealed graduate program faculty agreed questions of meaning and purpose were important but

were not making explicit links or using spirituality terminology in a way that would enable pre-professionals to respond to students' questions.

Mayhew, Rockenbach, and Bowman (2016) contended that graduate education must confront its negligence in helping students negotiate sensitive and challenging topics, such as spirituality, because it serves as a connection for student affairs programs such as health, wellness, and community service. Graduate education is a logical place for future student affairs practitioners to learn to engage students (Laurence, 1999). Since college is when students are forming identities and questioning many things, student affairs personnel must be ready to facilitate conversations concerning the big questions of life (Parks, 2000, 2011).

Spirituality and Student Affairs Practitioners

Kiessling (2010), in studying 177 student affairs practitioners, reported 50.3% were "searching for meaning/purpose in life" very often or always, 66% "considered themselves a spiritual person", and 54.8% felt that to "integrate spirituality into my life" was very or extremely important (p. 3). But respondents speculated only 14.7% of their colleagues were spiritual (p. 3), and only 11.3% had conversations with colleagues about the meaning of life (p. 3). Lindholm (2014), in a nation-wide study of college faculty, found more than 80% felt their professional and spiritual lives were at least somewhat integrated, and more than half reported a sense of calling in their work. Liddell, Hornak, and Ignelzi (2016) suggested that being aware of and practicing personal values allows student affairs practitioners to "work towards more consistency between our inner lives (our thoughts, beliefs, and values) and our outer lives (our choices and behaviors)" (p. 58).

Several researchers have acknowledged that student affairs practitioners must reflect on their own spiritual development before they can guide students in their development (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Love & Talbot, 1999; Rogers & Love, 2007b). But, according to Seifert (2015), few student affairs practitioners in public institutions intentionally incorporate students' religious or spiritual worldviews into their work. Robinson and Glanzer (2016) noted that few studies have examined how students perceive the institution's role in development of life purpose and argues that spiritual worldview is often forgotten by institutions who value race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity in their programs, practices, and policies (Mayhew et al., 2016; Patel, 2016).

Students expect student affairs practitioners to mentor them through their spiritual development (Chickering et al., 2006; Parks 2000, 2011) as with other identities (Nash & Murray, 2010). The danger, according to Arum and Roksa (2014), is that "colleges are producing graduates with happy memories of their time in college but little sense of purpose or any 'clear way forward'" (p. 1). More than half of the recent college graduates they interviewed stated they lacked direction for their lives. Affirmation, encouragement, and compassion are needed for students trying to figure out their purpose and create meaning. Nash and Murray (2010) challenged universities by asking, "What exactly are campus educators to do for the growing army of meaning-challenged students who arrive on our campuses" (p. 30)?

Reasons for Excluding Spirituality

There are several reasons cited for not responding to students looking for mentors in their spiritual journey. Seifert and Holman-Harmon (2009) identified two: connotations of the word spirituality and lack of a strong sense of meaning or purpose in practitioners' lives. Nash and

Murray (2010) also noted practitioner concerns related to violation of confidentiality, practicing beyond their competence, fear they might be perceived to indoctrinate, and a perception they favor or disfavor meaning narratives (p. 161). Lindholm (2014) found college faculty were reluctant to engage with students on spirituality due to fear of criticism by colleagues and a perception they did not have the skills and knowledge to address issues that may arise through those conversations. Over half of the students in the HERI study reported their faculty never engage them in discussions about religion, spirituality, or the meaning of life, even though students showed the greatest growth in their spirituality when faculty encouraged them to explore questions of meaning or purpose (Astin et al., 2011).

Nash and Murray (2010) summarized the concerns by stating "Because the academy has done little to encourage active meaning-making on college campuses, we have no precedent on how to proceed in this process without causing harm to ourselves and our students" (p. 161). Talbot and Anderson (2013) echoed that sentiment, "In public higher education, we continually struggle with the fine line between religion and spirituality experienced by many of our students, as well as wrestle with the role of religion/spirituality in our own work" (p. 194).

Speck (2005) cited additional factors which contribute to the avoidance of spirituality in higher education. First, the misguided belief that the separation of church and state dictates that religion should be excluded from secular institutions. Second, higher education tends to value rationality and objectivity, which are diametrically opposed to the subjective and personal nature of spiritualty. Last, most faculty and staff have had no preparation to address spiritual issues in their professional training. Faculty and staff are not educated on all the world's religions and beliefs. Many are uncomfortable discussing such a personal topic, perceive a lack of support

from supervisors, or think they may be misunderstood as trying to convert students to a certain worldview. Chickering (2006) remarked, “Each of us needs to be as forthcoming as possible about our own passions and prejudices. We need to declare why we believe being authentic is critical not only for higher education, but for the United States” (p. 5).

In one way or another, colleges and universities strive to educate the whole student, but spiritual identity is not “a part of the way many of us know and understand our students” (Small, 2015, p. 2). Despite this, Nash and Murray (2010) observed:

> We are struck by the existential plight of the majority of our students who come into our classes, offices, and residence halls just wanting to find something that they can believe in, something that they can give their hearts and heads to. Why can’t we talk in higher education about what gives our lives real meaning? (p. 38)

They asserted “Entertaining students’ questions of meaning and accompanying them as they seek answers requires any educator—faculty or student affairs professional—to stretch beyond a subject-level expertise” (Nash & Murray, 2010, p. 279). Dalton, Crosby and Mauk (2010) cited several ways student affairs practitioners are already involved in this work, including academic dishonesty, sports scandals, racial intolerance, sexual violence, and student suicides. Kiessling (2010) found for student activities practitioners “spirituality is not embraced as a foundational concept of the profession” (p. 8).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (National Center for Student Engagement, 2007) stated that colleges and universities must do a better job of helping students connect their academic experiences with their values, commitments, and beliefs. Parks, as quoted in Schwartz (2007), noted, “In today’s world, faculty and staff need to be appropriately curious about

students as whole people, not only the aspect for which they have a particular responsibility" (p. 6). She challenged practitioners to ask:

> How do I order my own life within the college and university setting in a way that creates the optimum possibilities for the becoming of the students that are entrusted to us for a brief, but a very powerful and significant time during the formation of their adult life? (p. 7)

The National Survey of Student Engagement (National Center for Student Engagement, 2007) found faculty participants do not discuss spirituality with their colleagues. Chickering (2006) termed this a discrepancy between "espoused values" and "values in use" (p. 5). Nash and Murray (2010) argued, "if educators are truly to meet students at the point of meaning and educate holistically, these borders must be crossed, and this territory must be explored" (p. 82).

Lest student affairs practitioners think faculty bear total responsibility for addressing spirituality with students, Nash and Murray (2010) replied, "Students' lives outside the classroom are veritable laboratories of philosophical meaning-making. Through their co-curricular involvements, they test their hypotheses of the good life and measure the behavior they display externally with the ideals they hold internally" (p. 140). Baxter Magolda (2009) asserted mentors must have had similar experiences to assist students in identity development. Craft and Hochella (2010) found in their study of student affairs practitioners, many, when asked, were unable to identify their life purpose.

In another direction, Arum and Roksa (2014) claimed many four-year institutions emphasize students' social adjustment over character development. As a result, graduates take with them many memories, but no clear way forward for their life or sense of purpose as

illustrated by over half of their respondents who agreed their lives lacked direction and they were ‘meandering.’ The authors asserted it is the responsibility of higher education to provide direction to students who are more and more “adrift” in our institutions.

Having reviewed the history and foundational documents in student affairs practice and explored the findings of current research, the next section will focus on specific areas near to the heart of student affairs work.

Student Affairs Concepts and Spirituality

There are several student affairs practices related to spirituality. This section will discuss several of them, including transformational learning, community and belonging, mentoring relationships, the power of conversation, and finally, the separation of church and state.

Transformational learning. Fried (2006) stated, “Meaning making processes are critical for transformative learning” (p. 6). In *Learning Reconsidered 2*, she highlighted these characteristics of learning:

- Learning has physiological, social and emotional, cognitive, and developmental dimensions; people seek patterns and meaning in what they learn. Active, experiential learning which is followed by processing in emotionally safe environments can produce transformative learning, in which the learner is engaged as a whole; body, mind, emotion, and spirit.
- Learning is an ongoing process of acquiring, analyzing, and placing information into a pre-existing meaning, which often includes their core beliefs and perspectives. The result of this process is often to alter or expand perspectives.

- Learning is integrated; students synthesize curricular and co-curricular experiences to make sense of themselves and their world.
- Transformational learning impacts students' lives and changes them.
- Transformative learning is likely if students are engaged in experiences that expect them to incorporate learning into the context of their life experience. (pp. 3-5)

According to Fried (2006), education is often embedded in a positivist epistemology, knowledge exists objectively, separate from the person who is learning, which omits questions of meaning, experience, or involvement. But education is as much about helping students understand themselves as testing and grading (Nash & Murray, 2010).

Nash and Yang (2015) contended colleges should have a core purpose of preparing students for lifelong growth. They criticize the separation between academic programs and student affairs and assert it has left students with little time and space to reflect on a deeper purpose to their education and lives. Nash and Yang (2015) stated that institutions must prioritize facilitation of students' quest to develop meaning. They emphasized: ". . . we must ask why educators rarely welcome students' 'big questions' into the classroom. What happens if there is no forum, no safe place for young people to air their questions?" (pp. 59-60).

The Gallup-Purdue Index Report (Gallup Inc., 2014) of 30,000 college graduates reported feeling supported and having high impact experiences, interchangeable with transformational learning, during college had long term benefits. For instance, if the graduate had a professor who cared about them and made them excited to learn, combined with an encouraging mentor, their chance of being engaged at work more than doubled and they were more than three times as likely to be thriving than their peers. Unfortunately, only 22% of students cited they had a

college mentor. Vianden (2015) found that interpersonal relationships with college personnel, including student affairs practitioners, was the main driver in the satisfaction of students concerning their college education. Nash and Murray (2010) claimed that today's professional training does not prepare practitioners for 'deep-meaning education,' described as

> our capacity to work with students in ways that do not impose a particular narrative upon them but do create the space in which we may appropriately evoke, respond, inform, clarify, enrich, and even inspire the meaning-making process of our students-encouraging their capacity for curiosity, skepticism, and meaningful commitments. (p. ix)

Students process learning through their personal values. Learning is not internalized until it is personalized through their lens of understanding. Students want to know "what is there about religion and spirituality that might help them shape their destinies, understand their histories, and develop a moral imagination, and might give them something worth living and dying for?" (Nash & Murray, 2010 p. 56).

Community and belonging. Parks (2000, 2011) contended that young adults cannot find their way through their emerging self without the assistance of a "mentoring community" comprised of individual mentors, peers, and social groups, which comprise a "network of belonging" (p. 95). One of the most important roles of higher education is to

> Create communities in which students feel welcomed and safe while being provided with experiences that will encourage them to explore and address conscious conflicts, have opportunities for pause, and be supported as they clarify, confirm, and test their new images. (Evans et al., 2010, p. 208)

Residence halls, living-learning communities, and student organizations are common places students experience this belonging (Tinto, 2006). Strayhorn (2012) stated that a sense of belonging is a basic human need, strong enough to influence behavior. A perceived sense of support from others and the campus climate, which is a sense of connectedness, mattering, being cared about, accepted, respected, valued, and important forms the basis for social connection. "To excel, students must feel a sense of belonging in school (or college) and therefore educators must work to create conditions that foster belongingness among students" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 9). There exists a constant tension between the desire for autonomy and the need for connectedness, which a mentoring community can ease (Siner, 2015). Students need to make sense of their role in the community as well (Strayhorn, 2012). During times of stress and uncertainty, individuals seek the connection of others with whom they can identify. If students do not see a faith community on their campus, they can experience alienation (Strayhorn, 2012).

According to Strayhorn (2012), social identities affect a students' sense of belonging, which is based on several assumptions

1. Sense of belonging is a basic human need.
2. Sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior.
3. Sense of belonging takes on heightened importance (a) in certain contexts (b) at certain times, (c) among certain populations.
4. Sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering, such as being valued, appreciated, and cared about.
5. Social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging.

6. Sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes related to wellbeing, happiness, and engagement.
7. Sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change. (p. 18)

Nash and Murray (2010) explained:

> All our students, however, need some sense of personal identity, a semblance of a community life in which they can participate, a reasonable way to discern what is right and wrong conduct, and a starting point for explaining those aspects of life that seem either enigmatic or ultimately unknowable. (p. 55)

Mentoring environments. Park championed the role of mentoring environments; places where "students feel truly seen as whole persons, appropriately supported, challenged in timely and fitting ways, and inspired to embrace worthy aspirations" (Parks et al., 1996 cited in Schwartz, 2007, p. 6). He further explained that "In well-crafted mentoring environments, big questions are present, there is access to worthy dreams, and young adults are invited to imagine a future that can hold significance and purpose-both for self and for the larger world" (p. 6). Colleges create mentoring environments through faculty, mentors, guest speakers, internships, and education abroad experiences (Parks et al., 1996). Mentors "support our best aspirations, challenge us to reach beyond ourselves, and perhaps most important, inspire us by giving us important work to do in the world" (Parks et al., 1996, p. 15). Parks (2008) identified five elements found in a positive mentoring environment:

1. Recognition-of both potential and vulnerability;
2. Support-encouragement that honors vulnerability;

3. Challenge-rightly timed, and honoring of potential;
4. Inspiration-by the way they live, sometimes by the big questions they ask, and by what they point to as an aspiration or affirmation. This comprises the spiritual dimension of mentoring.
5. Accountability-trustworthiness in what and how they invite students to be in relationship. (p. 6-7)

Robinson and Glanzer (2016) found holistic students identified a specific significant relationship as one way they explored life purpose during college and the authors recommended student affairs practitioners explore life purpose with students. Nash and Yang (2015) encouraged student affairs practitioners to incorporate meaning-making into their work. They espoused the most powerful moments occur when they guide students to think on the profound questions of life.

Baxter Magolda (2009) termed those who assist students through emerging adulthood "good company;" striving to provide a balance of support and challenge towards self-authorship. She outlined three essential elements of good company in her Learning Partnerships Model. First, to support students by respecting their thoughts and feelings. Next, to help them sort through their experiences, and finally, collaborate to help them solve their problems. Further, Baxter Magolda (2009) stated that good company must also challenge young adults to deal with complex issues at work and in their personal life, develop their own personal authority, and work collaboratively with others to solve mutual issues. Gaining confidence in their inner voice is key to creating self-authorship. Often, mentors are the ones who encourage that voice to emerge as they "offer guidance for creating a philosophy for managing their reaction to reality, support

integration of aspects of their identity, and offer feedback that helps them refine their internal foundation." (p. 250). Parks (2000) espoused the importance of a mentoring community for emerging adults, stating that it offers a "network of belonging in which young adults feel recognized for who they really are, and as who they are becoming" (p. 95).

Whereas student affairs practitioners used to have leadership in experiences that would help students develop their values, beliefs, and behaviors, now moral guidance is institutionalized in student conduct codes and procedures. Student affairs staff, especially in secular colleges, have "been reluctant to assume a broader obligation to help guide and influence the moral lives of students" (Nash & Murray, 2010, p. 4). One of the reasons is fear of intervening in such a personal way but prevents student affairs practitioners from incorporating moral objectives and outcomes into their work.

> Mentors and advisors with whom a student has a particularly trusting and open relationship can help that student develop his or her system of meaning. With a few well-placed questions to guide the process, meaning mentors can help students scaffold a philosophy of life that can carry them through the dark hours, as well as the triumphant ones. (Nash & Murray, 2010, p. 140)

The power of conversation. The word conversation comes from the Latin meaning "wandering together with" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

> Conversation is a basic mode of human interaction. Human beings talk with each other; they interact, pose questions, and answer questions. Through conversations we get to know other people and learn about their experiences, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 1)

Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen and Daloz Parks (1996) maintained "There must be dialogue across real differences about things that matter" (p. 14). Faculty are still resistant to have spiritual conversations in the classroom (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Deffenbaugh (2011) found students in entry level religion courses were seeking to talk about spirituality, but faculty could be classified into three perspectives; those who felt religion does not belong in academia, those who stated religion and spirituality were the domain of the co-curricular college experience and finally, faculty who welcomed the opportunity to integrate the big questions of life into their classrooms (Deffenbaugh, 2011).

While developing a spiritual identity is a personal matter, there is also an element of community and sharing (Siner, 2015). Student affairs practitioners must be willing to engage students in conversations about many challenging and personal issues, including spirituality.

> Many people acknowledge that religion and spirituality are somehow relevant to educational processes, but most don't know how to talk about it. The conversation about such matters is dominated on many campuses by the extremes: by convinced believers championing traditional religion, on the one hand, and by emotivists of vague spirituality on the other. (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 5)

Nash and Murray (2010) discussed the role of student affairs practitioners having meaning-making conversations with students "to inform, clarify, and respond. We do not intend to reform or perform" (p. 77). Student affairs staff must go beyond serving as a sounding board for students. They must also be willing to appropriately share their story as well. Nash and Murray (2010) believe that:

> During meaning-making conversations about the challenges and opportunities of adulthood, we must share our own unique experiences of becoming adults. We must talk honestly about our own personal, ongoing efforts to deal with the challenging issues of commitment, work, stuckness, and growing up and assuming responsibility. (p. 29)

The importance of these conversations cannot be underestimated according to Nash and Murray (2010), who proclaimed. “In fact, there can be no genuine constructivist pedagogy, or deep meaning learning, without continual conversation between and among educators, learners, and others within the ever-expanding circles of students’ relationships” (p. 106).

Interfaith conversations are one of the most effective ways to assist students develop their religious identity and learn social justice and other worldview perspectives (Small, 2011). For atheist students, these structured conversations provide a safe space to share their perspective, rather than risk sharing in an environment where they may be stigmatized (Mueller, 2012).

Often these conversations do not occur; several reasons have been offered. One of the most common is the concern over the separation of church and state, and actual and perceived restrictions.

Separation of church and state. Free exercise of religion and freedom from the establishment of religion are highly iconic American ideals (Adams & Joshi, 2013), as stated in the First Amendment, which requires governmental entities to remain neutral concerning religion, neither advancing any religion, nor prohibiting the practice of religion (Whittaker, Salend, & Elhoweris, 2013). Similarly, neutrality, academic freedom, and nondiscrimination are valued in higher education and supported by court decisions (Waggoner, 2016). The Civil

Rights Act of 1964, as amended, prohibits discrimination based on religion (Waggoner, 2016), often raising a concern that speaking about religion may offend a student.

Institutions of higher education may opt for a total abstinence perspective that interprets religious neutrality as a strict separation of church and state. But Chickering (2006) claimed that "Higher education is not value free. Each policy, and practice we adopt, each resource allocation judgement, staffing and personnel decision we make, expresses a value priority" (p. 4). Another interpretation, which focuses on fairness, strives for free exercise of religion. Courts have generally supported this approach (Waggoner, 2016). Adams and Joshi (2013) identified two myths associated with Christian hegemony. First is the core myth that there was, and is, religion for all. From the colonial era to the present, a multitude of religious intolerances and oppressions have been documented. The second core myth is that there is a separation of church and state. While the constitution requires this separation, and its intent is to support religion in public life, the consequence has often been to oppress minority religions. Lowry (2005) contended that many institutions are hesitant to address spiritual issues because they do not understand how the First Amendment translates into practice, but that having that knowledge is imperative (Waggoner, 2016). In 1900, most student were enrolled in private colleges and universities, but today over two-thirds attend public institutions (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012), so the separation of church and state is a relevant issue.

Talbot and Anderson (2013) commented there "remains an unspoken rule that 'separation of church and state' limits our ability to see religion/spirituality as part of the holistic development of students" (p. 194). Small (2015) identified challenges yet to be overcome as "developing a widespread understanding of the legal considerations applicable to providing

guidance, as well as discussion of spiritual development within public institutions" (p. 8). Kessler (2000) summarized. "To me, the most important challenge has always been not *whether* we can address spiritual development in secular schools, but *how*." (p. ix)

Summary of the Section

The history, mission, and current practice of student affairs denote a role for spirituality and spiritual identity development. Creating a sense of community, mentoring students, and being open to having deep, caring conversations are crucial to best practices. Nash and Murray (2010) proclaimed:

> . . . it is crucial for campus educators to think about the role the study of religion and spirituality plays in the meaning-making of students of all ages, at all levels in higher education, in public and private, secular and parochial venues. (pp. 58-59)

Having established a place for student affairs in addressing spirituality on campus, this paper will examine the theoretical framework to guide the study. The review will begin with the foundational theorists, detail the framework, and conclude with emerging theoretical concepts.

Theoretical Framework

Creating a theoretical framework to view the complexity of identity development, both in general, and as it particularly applies to spiritual development, is drawn from the cumulative work of many theorists. In this section, foundational theorists provide the groundwork for a more detailed examination of the works of Fowler and Parks, whose works form the conceptual framework for this study. To conclude this section, a brief introduction of the more recent theorists and ideas related to both spirituality and the intersectionality of identities will be undertaken. The genesis of Park's theory of emerging adult development is based on

foundational theorists, so it makes sense to begin where Parks did, by reviewing cognitive development, moral development, and faith formation theories. Following this, an analysis of Fowler, who Park's states her theory stand within and elaborates on, will be introduced prior to discussing Park's theory in detail and concluding with a review of recent theorists in faith development.

Foundational Theorists

Erikson, one of the grandfathers of developmental psychology and psychosocial development (Parks, 1986), created a lifespan theory of eight stages, with completion of each stage's task necessary to successfully move to the next one. Identity versus Identity Diffusion (Confusion) bridges the transition from childhood to adulthood—the traditional college years. At the end of this stage, an individual either has developed a sense of identity or lacks "a clear sense of self or purpose" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 50).

Chickering, a psychosocial developmentalist, identified seven vectors of college student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). The vector, 'Developing Integrity', consisted of humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence, which permeates across the other vectors to provide "competence, emotions, relationships, identity, and purpose together in a coherent way" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 149).

Piaget worked from a constructive-developmental framework (Patton et al., 2016). He contended that individuals develop "increasingly complex structures (or capabilities) to receive, compose and know their world" (Parks, 1986, p. 33). This occurs through assimilation, a process in which new information is integrated into existing knowledge, forcing the structure to adapt to incorporate it (Evans et al., 2010).

Cognitive and moral developmental theories share key elements and are generally stage-based (Renn & Reason, 2013). Perry's models from 1970 and 1981 of intellectual and ethical development contains nine positions that span from dualism to relativism, with significant growth occurring during the college years. His theory explained thought processes that accompany changes in spirituality (Perry, 1999), and thus is the most widely used of the theories related to the meaning-making of college students (Patton et.al., 2016).

Kegan, inspired by Piaget's theory, envisioned individuals made sense of their lives through a struggle that ultimately resulted in a view of themselves as more than their embedded image (Parks, 1986). Baxter Magolda (2009) espoused students move from externally influenced decision-making to self-authorship, which she defined as listening to their inner voice when they reach a "crossroads."

Moral stage development, as theorized by Kohlberg, is one of the first to specifically address college students (Evans et al., 2010). He envisioned a strong connection between moral and cognitive development. He extended Piaget's work to the lifespan and believed development is enhanced by two factors: exposure to higher-stage thinking and disequilibrium, a challenge when one experiences conflicts or internal contradictions (Renn & Reason, 2013). Burkard, Cole, Ott, and Stoflet (2005), in a study of mid- and senior student affairs professionals, found Kohlberg's 1984 theory and Perry's 1981 Cognitive and Ethical Growth theory ranked third and fourth in importance for entry level student affairs practice.

Gilligan (cited in Evans et al., 2010; Liddell et al., 2016) added a strong relational focus to understanding growth and maturation, emphasizing individuals move through life and its developmental processes being influenced by others. Gilligan expanded on Kohlberg's work on

women's moral development and the concept of moral development in the social context (Evans et al., 2010).

Spiritual Theorists

In summary, Erickson, Piaget, Kegan, Kohlberg, and Gilligan laid the foundation for understanding development as individuals moved through their lives, including the critical tasks of emerging adulthood (Parks, 1986; Patton et al., 2016). Building on this, other theorists created frameworks for understanding spiritual development.

Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

Fowler "has most comprehensively and effectively pioneered the interdisciplinary study of the relationship between developmental psychologies and faith" (Parks, 1986, p. 40), and his theory still has a profound influence on spiritual development theories (Siner, 2015). Fowler's 1981 developmental theory, detailed in *Stages of Faith*, was the first to integrate human development theory and faith development (Love, 2002). He promoted faith as universal, which could be studied, as with other human traits. He expanded on the work of Erickson (identity), Kohlberg (morality) and Piaget (intelligence) in his concept of stages of development, with each stage resulting in an emergent strength when navigated successfully (Siner, 2015).

Several of Fowler's stages encompass the traditional college student years. Stage 3, or Synthetic-conventional Faith, emerges in early adolescence and coincides with the ability to think abstractly (Fowler, 1981). It is characterized by a strong need to have beliefs supported by others and an inability to critically examine faith. Fowler associated Stage 4 with emerging adulthood, but later acknowledged it to be more typical of mid-adulthood, where "one's self-

definition becomes self-authored and one's system of beliefs, values and commitments becomes a coherent and explicit meaning-making system" (Evans, et al., 2010, p. 198).

As with other stage theories, the external environment or internal changes create dissonance in current beliefs, which leads the individual to re-examine their belief system and eventually move to the next stage (Evans, et al., 2010). Many theorists have cited emerging adulthood as a common example.

But Fowler's work has been the subject of criticism. He designed his theory to be "inclusive of all faith traditions and orientations and therefore is not content specific" (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 57). It broke ground in acknowledging that in addition to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender, a student's belief system is also formed during the college years, although students may not recognize their belief system as a separate identity since it is often enmeshed with more visible identities, especially for students with a minority racial, ethnic, or belief system (Stewart & Lozano, 2009). Despite introducing spirituality as an identity, Fowler's work with only Christian, and mostly male, students led some to question whether his theory is universal (Patton et al., 2016). Individuals with a non-Christian orientation may not experience faith development in the same way. As with other stages theories, there is an underlying assumption that later stages are superior, which may not always hold true (Siner, 2015).

Parks, a student of Fowler, built on his theories (Chickering et al., 2006), which she described as "standing within and critically elaborating on" (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 57). The transition between his third and fourth stages, which occurs during the traditional college years, formed the timeframe of Park's theory. Frequently, Fowler and Parks are mentioned as essential

theorists in the area of faith development (Evans et al., 2010; Patton et al., 2016) As the framework for this study, a more detailed examination of Park's theory is needed.

Park's Theory of Emerging Adulthood

The conceptual framework to inform this study is Parks' (2000, 2011) theory of faith development in emerging adulthood (Patton et al., 2016; Waggoner, 2016). Over the past 30 years, developmentalists have created theory to explain how college students create identity and make meaning during the college years. The task of internalizing values and beliefs occurs during the late teens and early twenties, labeled by Parks as emerging adulthood (1986, 2000, 2011). This critical time has been addressed from various perspectives, explaining that emerging adults will develop in complexity, not only in spiritual development, but in cognitive, psychosocial, and biological aspects as well (McNamara & Abo-Zena, 2014).

Park's work emerges from her experience as a theologian, teacher, counselor, and minister (Love, 2002), where she focused on the ethic of care for self and others and strove for social justice (Renn & Reason, 2013). As spirituality became in-vogue on college campuses, Park's book, *Big Questions Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose and Faith* (2000), garnered significant attention. She incorporated knowing, dependence, and community constructs into four developmental stages, which she titled adolescent or conventional faith, young adult faith, tested adult faith, and mature adult faith (Parks, 1986). Park's work can be understood more comprehensively with a further analysis of her four developmental stages and a detailed explanation of emerging adulthood.

Emerging adulthood. Believing that most stage-related developmental theories minimized the "critical years" of young adulthood, Parks (1986) chose to focus her work on the

specific changes that occur during this time. She termed this stage, which bridged childhood and the adult years, as “young adult” or “emerging adulthood” (Love, 2002). While Parks chose the term emerging adults, other scholars have portrayed individuals in their twenties as “not quite adults” (Settersten & Ray, 2010) or “quarterlifers” (Nash & Murray, 2010). Emerging adulthood is when most individuals “transition from seeing the world as ultimately knowable and certain to seeing the world as complex, ambiguous, and not completely knowable” (Love, 2002, p. 366). Nash and Murray (2010) described individuals in this stage of life as,

> Wading in the chest-deep waters of meaning, attempting to reconcile their deepest-held beliefs with their often surprising or heartbreaking observations of the world. They are measuring their ways of knowing against those of their peers, their teachers, and the great thinkers who have passed before them. During the four to six years of an undergraduate education, they hold all of these comparisons in tension and mix them with their families; expectations and their own hopes for the future. (p. 82)

Parks focused on faith development, which she describes as a “spiritual quest to make sense out of life experiences and to seek patterns, order, coherence, and relation among the disparate elements of human living” (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 58). She elaborated on faith as “the deep ground, the loom on which the rest of the particular threads of life’s tapestry find their place” and the act of faith as the “weaving of an overarching ‘canopy of significance’ that embraces, orders, and relativizes all of our knowing and being” (Parks, 2011, p. 34). With an understanding of emerging adulthood and faith, the four stages of Park’s faith development theory can be better understood.

Adolescent or conventional faith. The first stage of Park's theory is characterized by authority-bound, dualistic forms of knowing, dependent/counter-dependent forms of dependence, and conventional forms of community (Chickering et al., 2006). Individuals have faith in and adamantly follow external authorities such as organizations, religions, role models, causes, and parents. Truth, as defined by these authorities, is straightforward, rigid, and allows little room for tolerance (Evans et al., 2010). This stage is similar to Fowler's (1981) Synthetic-Conventional belief stage, where individuals embrace childhood faith structures and have had no occasion to "step outside them to reflect on or examine them explicitly or systematically" (p. 173). It is when individuals begin to outgrow the values and perspectives of authority figures that they turn to their inner voice (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Parks (2000, 2011) described that stage as Young Adult Faith.

Young adult faith. Probing commitment forms of knowing, fragile inner-dependent forms of dependence, and mentoring forms of community frame the young adult faith stage. (Chickering et al., 2006). Parks (2000, 2011) contended that emerging adults begin to expand their ways of knowing. Some commitments are short-term, as they try various identities, and reject or compartmentalize information to avoid the internal conflict that can occur when introduced to truths contradictory to their belief system. During this time, students may seek new mentors as they rebel against their childhood ones. Most theorists label this exploratory process as a transition, but Parks deemed it important enough to warrant a unique stage. She emphasized

> At their best colleges and universities provide a place where students may move from ways of understanding that rest upon tacit, conventional assumptions to more critical,

> systemic thought that can take many perspectives into account; make discernments among them; and envision new possibilities. (Parks et al., 1996, p. 11).

Baxter Magolda (2009) used the analogy of a tandem bicycle to explain the exploration process of young adulthood. Through adolescence, individuals ride on the back of the bike, following the lead of parents, teachers, and other mentors. College marks the transition when these authorities take the back seat and allow the student to determine the course. Baxter Magolda (2009) stated an individual must learn to trust their internal voice, build an internal foundation, and then secure internal commitments. Self-authorship described the transition of an individual cultivating their inner voice and using their core values to navigate through life.

Tested and mature adult faith. Tested commitment (systemic) forms of knowing, confident inner-dependent forms of dependence, and self-selected class/group forms of community are the hallmarks of this stage (Chickering et al., 2006). Adults in this stage can articulate beliefs embraced as their own. Internal faith and interdependence, concepts which are not often found in undergraduates, develop. While individuals in this stage tend to associate with others from the same group or perspective and have a strong commitment to certain people, values, ideals, and ways of being, they are more open to accepting the "other," those with different beliefs (Parks, 2011). Baxter Magolda (2009) labeled this stage as "authoring your life." There are parallels between Baxter Magolda's journey to self-authorship and Park's faith development theory. They identify similar stages of development that begin with primary trust in an external authority and are finalized when the individual knows and lives from their own inner voice, while respecting the voices of others. Parks labels this final stage as mature adult faith.

Individuals at the mature adult faith stage are comfortable with the ambiguity and doubt of their convictions and feel a greater belonging to the broader world (Love, 2001). They "possess both a deep commitment to their own understanding of truth and the ability to recognize and appreciate the truth of others" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 204). This is the least developed stage of Park's theory, rarely occurring prior to mid-life, as it acknowledges the interdependence and the interconnectedness often associated with wisdom (Park, 2011). Baxter Magolda (2009) expressed a similar idea that wisdom "emerges when knowledge merges with sense of self as a result of living the facts" (p. 60).

Parks (2000, 2011) embedded other ideas in her theory that are worthy of mention. She is the only theorist to examine the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of student development and meaning-making (Love, 2002). She incorporated knowing to describe cognitive development, dependence to express the affective dimension, and community as a symbol for the social dimension (Parks, 2000, 2011). The next section will elaborate on these concepts.

Knowing. Parks (1986) asserted that her theory is "anchored" in cognitive development "because it is this dimension of young adult development that is most unambiguously the focus of higher education" (p. 43). Based on Perry's pattern of development, Parks (1986) asserted that students move through several "forms of knowing" during the college years. Most students enter higher education "authority-bound and "dualistic," following some authority-like person or idea that they believe embodies truth. The student easily classifies things as good/bad, right/wrong or other dualistic paradigms which mirror the view of their authority (Parks, 1986).

When the young adult is exposed to new ideas conflicting with accepted beliefs and the authority figure is found to be fallible, "unqualified relativism" occurs (Parks, 2000, 2011). She

used the term “shipwreck” to describe the magnitude of the revelation in the life of the young adult as they find themselves without an anchor for their life. When students face the unexpected that disappoints or challenges their way of thinking and being such as a family crisis, loss of relationship or identity, health, betrayal of a role model or hero, shipwreck is often the result. Love (2002) described shipwreck as students “struggle to make sense of competing authorities, of our own growing sense of self-awareness and self-authority, and of the multiple communities we experience” (p. 365). Baxter Magolda (2009) used the term crossroads to describe this phenomenon, which happens when individuals are torn between continuing to follow another’s expectations and vision, or to decide to listen to their own inner voice. Crossroads lead them to reexamine what was true and create a new belief system which more realistically reflects their reality.

Dependence. Park (1986) explained, “in complex modern society, emerging adults experience a slow and sporadic transition from full dependence upon parents or authorities to independence and autonomy” (p. 367). The individual may even display counter-dependence as they seek to distance themselves from the authority during the college years (Chickering et al., 2006). Baxter Magolda (2009) stated, “Parents, friends, religious figures, or other voices may still have authority in your life, but simply following their lead no longer yields success, contentment, satisfaction, confidence—or joy” (p. xvi), and young adults develop their own ‘inner voice.’

Big questions. Parks (1986, 2000, 2011) stated questions play a critical role in the formation of meaning, faith, and a viable adulthood. Questions become big, when they serve

> As avenues to a larger and more significant inquiry and they often arise in the context of everyday experience. Who am I? Who do I want to become? Am I loveable? Do I matter? How do I want to spend my time-and my life? (Schwartz 2007, p. 3)

Big questions of life offer universality, rather than limiting beliefs to the realm of the religious. The big questions also serve to frame the conversation of faith and meaning-making in a way that relates to the common experiences of emerging adults. One of the advantages, according to Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012), is that it "levels the playing field. Everyone has being-questions, whether or not that person self-identifies as explicitly religious, nebulously spiritual or thoroughly secular" (p. 45).

Critique of Park's theory. While Park's theory is mainstream in college student faith development, there are those who applaud her work and others who cite its limitations. Park's emphasis on the community or the social environment had not received much attention in other theories (Love, 2001). Previous developmental theories lacked the role of others and the environment, which Park rectified. Evans et al. (2010) asserted that there are two distinctions in Park's theory. First, she extensively examined both cognitive and emotional development and how they are interwoven in young adult development. Secondly, Parks includes the important stage of early adult development that was missing from other theories. But, despite the accolades of Park, there are alleged limitations to her theory. Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) asserted that it may not "appreciate the benefits that can result from staying loyal to the rituals and disciplines of a particular religious tradition" (p. 44).

Developmental stage theories, in general, are criticized for not being representative of all student faith backgrounds (Chickering et al., 2006; Small, 2015). Claims that Parks based her

theory on “Western cultural assumptions of independence and individualism” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 210) are common in the research literature. Both Fowler and Park’s research was conducted on predominantly white college students, leading to criticism that the resulting theories may not be valid for students of color; though both researchers believed they were inclusive of all worldviews and identities (Parks, 2011).

Chickering et al. (2006) stated that most stage theories are “oversimplified and not consistent with many research findings” (p. 62), but Fowler (1981) and Parks (1986) have offered the most comprehensive faith development theories to date. Evans et al. (2010) and Craft and Hochella (2010) cited limited research to validate Park’s theory, despite it being widely quoted in literature reviews.

Small’s Faith Frames

One of the emerging voices in college student faith development is Jenny Small, who added a social justice frame. She asserts that “theories and practices which heretofore have claimed to be universal in nature, but which truly operate from a Christian perspective, must be replaced by those which are inclusive of all faiths, religious or otherwise” (Small, 2008, p. 337). Small categorized student faith development using four “faith frames:” Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Agnostic/Atheist. Students in each frame reported unique language, experiences, and developmental challenges. She found significant marginalization of minority religion students (Bowman & Small, 2013). Her work demonstrated the importance of spirituality’s intersection with social justice issues.

Other Spiritual Identity Theorists

Recently, others have proposed spiritual development theories for various identities. Peek (2005) created a Muslim Identity Development model and Smith (2011) outlined a Model of Atheist Identity Development. Peek's Model of Muslim Identity Development among College Students consists of three stages. During the first stage: Religion as an Ascribed Identity, students adhere to their childhood religion. The second stage, Religion as a Chosen Identity, there is a re-examination of beliefs in light of new experiences and perspectives. The third stage is termed Religion as a Declared Identity, in which a student makes a commitment to following Islam (Peek, 2005).

Smith's (2011) Identity Development Model for non-religious students consists of four fluid components, which Smith stated may resemble stages. During the Starting Point, an individual is certain in the existence of a god, often a childhood belief. The second component, Questioning Theism, is initiated when the individual questions theism, as different perspectives are encountered. Both intellectually and in practice, students at this stage distance themselves from childhood beliefs. Rejecting Theism marks the transition from exploring alternatives to actively cultivating a secular perspective. While not always embracing the label of Atheist, individuals no longer identify with theistic beliefs. In the last component, Coming Out, an individual fully accepts and openly expresses Atheism.

Intersectionality of Identity Development

No one aspect of identity stands alone but interacts in individualized ways for individuals (Renn & Reason, 2013). When discussing the identities of college students, researchers commonly include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Spiritual identity is often invisible or given cursory mention. The intersectionality of students' various identities is increasingly being addressed in research and practice, including how religion combines with race, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, and other identities (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2014). While an intersectionality lens provides a more accurate and holistic view of the development of individual students, it also presents complexities in understanding them in all their various identities. Intersectionality incorporates a social justice lens into the discussion of identity (Renn & Reason, 2013). ". . . mono-identity development can confine and divide rather than liberate and conjoin" (Nash & Murray, 2010, p. 293). A conceptualized model by Jones, et al., (2000) adds a "meaning-making filter", which impacts what messages and influences impact the person's self-perception and identity (Renn & Reason, 2013). Park (2012) gave considerable focus to the importance of intersectionality in understanding the whole student.

Dunn et al. (2015) found that support from others was important for students with both a gay and religious identity. They suggested it is imperative for student affairs practitioners to understand how faith can impact formation of other identities. Dunn et al. stated although student affairs practitioners are often hesitant to address spirituality, it is important to help students "fully examine their faith, alongside their multiple and intersecting identities; doing any less falls short of our profession's call to develop the whole student" (p. 384).

Summary of the Section

Balancing the big questions, expectations of adulthood, and demands of academic life is challenging for college students. In addition to choosing a major, forming healthy relationships, and becoming independent, there are the big issues of life that go beyond simple answers and easy choices. Creating theories to explain these transitions and tasks has evolved from the

general, to those exclusively focusing on spiritual development. The most recent theories sought to explain how students from differing worldviews differ in their development and the ways spiritual identities intersect with various other identities.

College Students and Spirituality

Having discussed the connection between religion and higher education, the role of student affairs in higher education, and the theoretical framework that will guide this study, attention now turns to the role of spirituality in college students' lives. This section will examine the characteristics of students, what is known about their spiritual beliefs, the relationship between spirituality and well-being, and finally, the role of social justice.

Spirituality of College Students

Spirituality influences how students interpret their collegiate experience (Bowman & Small, 2013; Mayhew, 2012). Lipka (2015) in The Pew Research Institute study of Religion and Public Life of 35,071 adults, noted that between 2007 and 2014, the unaffiliated religious group (atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular') experienced the highest growth, up 6.7% to 22.8%. Religiously unaffiliated comprised 36% of the young adult respondents, the second largest American group, behind evangelical Protestants. Those who identified with non-Christian faiths increased from 4.7% to 5.9%. For both groups, the increase was most pronounced in young adults. Still, approximately seven in ten adults identified as Christian, but represented a group more racially and ethnically diverse than ever before.

Major studies have demonstrated the significant impact of spirituality on emerging adults (Astin et al., 2011; Bowman and Rockenbach, 2015). Studies have shown that students' beliefs remain stable or actually increase during emerging adulthood (McNamara & Abo-Zena, 2014).

*The National Study of Spirituality in Higher Education: Students' Search for Meaning and Purpos*e, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) beginning in 2004, was the first national, longitudinal examination of students' spirituality and how college influences that process. It involved 14,527 students attending 136 institutions (HERI, 2010). The authors concluded, "It is our shared belief that the findings provide a powerful argument for the proposition that higher education should attend more to students' spiritual development, because spirituality is essential to students' lives" (Astin et al., 2011).

The study examined five spiritual qualities, which reflect inner work and self-reflection.

1. Equanimity-the ability to find meaning in life which leads to being at peace with themselves and their life.
2. Spiritual Quest-an active search for meaning, which generally grows through the college years.
3. Ethic of Caring-An empathetic attitude and concern for others.
4. Charitable Involvement-related actions resulting from an ethic of caring.
5. Ecumenical Worldview-the ability to transcend one's own perspective to appreciate the values and beliefs of others; interconnectedness (pp. 20-21).

They also identified five religious qualities:

1. Religious Commitment-seeking to follow religious teaching in everyday life.
2. Religious Engagement-the behavioral aspect; singing, praying and reading sacred texts.
3. Religious/Social Conservatism-commonly known as Fundamentalism.
4. Religious Skepticism-the science of religion.

5. Religious Struggle-feeling unsettled about religious matters; questioning beliefs. (Astin et al., 2011, pp. 21-22)

Astin et al. (2011) noted students expect their institution to support them in creating a spiritual framework and practicing beliefs. The study reported 79% of college students believe in God, 69% pray, 81% attend religious services, 80% have discussed religion/spirituality with friends, and 76% have had these conversations with family.

Eagan, Stolzenberg, Zimmerman, Aragon, Sayon, and Rios-Aguilar (2016) in the 2016 CIRP Freshman survey added two designations for religious preference, agnostic and atheist, which was selected by 29.5% of students: Agnostic (8.3%), Atheist (5.9%) or none (15.4%). The percentage of students who reported a religious preference was 70.5%. Black students were the most likely to indicate a religious preference. Queer students were almost twice as likely to identify as Agnostic (25.1%). 67.4% of public university students identified with a specific religion.

There is renewed interest in Jewish campus ministries, Catholic Newman Centers and ministries that serve other religions (Mayrl & Oeur, 2009). A growing number of Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikh students, along with over 500 chapters of the Muslim Student Association in the United States and Canada attest to the diversity of religious perspectives on campus (Schmalzbauer, 2013). Almost one-third of college students do not identify with a major Christian denomination (Siner, 2015).

Small (2008, 2011) identified four faith frames to identify how students from various faith backgrounds created meaning:

1. Christianity: The predominant and majority religion in the United States.

2. Judaism: Focused on religious rituals and the insecure place of Jews throughout history. Sometimes this group is seen as privileged, so they are often not included in discussions on social justice and diversity (Siner, 2015).
3. Islam or Muslim: Students who identified with this religion emphasized communicating with those from other religious backgrounds and upholding their rituals on campuses that often do not understand their religion, even though Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States.
4. Atheism: Students who experience a lack of acceptance in a primarily religious society. The least amount of scholarship has been conducted on this group. These students often transition through stages of awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment and internalization/synthesis (Siner, 2015).

Small (2011) found agreement between students who identified with all the groups as to the hierarchy of groups with Christians at the top, non-Christians in the middle and Atheists at the bottom. Some evangelical Christians also reported feeling misunderstood and had experienced being stereotyped and targets of derogatory remarks, creating a negative campus climate (Felix & Bowman, 2015).

Nash and Murray (2010) classified four types of student religiosity:

1. Orthodox-those who follow an evangelical or non-denominational Christian faith.
2. Mainline-often Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish believers who value traditional worship and personal freedom.
3. Mystics-Eastern and Native American religions, folk religions, private spirituality. Mystery and seeking are common attributes.

4. Secular Humanists. Skeptics, Agnostics and Atheists. Social justice advocates, environmentalists, and civil libertarians.

Rockenbach et al., (2015) found that worldview majority students described their spirituality as rooted in connection to the universe and divine and were closely aligned with faith and belief. They explained a strong sense of existence of the divine, inner connectivity expressed as inner strength, a sense of a spiritual self, and connection to the supernatural. Worldview minority students saw their spiritual identity in relation to "connections to the divine and the universe" (p. 6) and had internal connectivity that resulted from inner peace and reflection. Nonreligious students identified their spiritual connections as being separate and distinct from organized religion. The commonality in these studies was that students from all three worldviews emphasized connectivity in their definitions of spirituality.

Etengoff and Daiute (2013) identified Sunni Muslim students use religion, religious practices, and religious artifacts to address the challenges and opportunities of emerging adulthood, while Cole and Ahmadi (2010) found Muslim students engaged in more diversity-related experiences than Christian or Jewish students. Owens (2013) found participation in religious groups and personal practice may be a support for students of color. Small (2015) noted one of the most substantial changes in higher and education and spirituality was the increasing acceptance of secular students.

Liddell and Stedman (2011) stated that those who identify as Humanistic, Ethical Culture, Agnostics, Atheists, secular, "no religion", or "none" are often referred to as non-religious. The Secular Student Alliance (SSA) (n.d.) grew from 50 groups in 2006 to 267 currently. Since secular students have a stigma and are sometimes misunderstood, they often

keep to themselves (Liddell & Stedman, 2011). There is reduced acceptance for those in a minority religious group (Bowman & Rockenbach, 2015). These students can experience stress and vulnerability disclosing their beliefs (Mayhew, 2012). Felix and Bowman (2015), in a review of relevant studies, concluded, “In short, although substantial group discrepancies exist in terms of students’ engagement and commitment with their religions/worldviews, the search for meaning and spiritual questioning is prevalent across religious/worldview identifications” (p. 48).

Research on many religions and worldviews is limited. Combining denominations and views into generalized categories, often minimizes their differences (Felix & Bowman, 2015). Robinson and Glanzer (2016) classified two types of students. The first, Holistics, expected the higher education experience to help them explore and discover their life purpose, while the second type, Instrumentalists, saw exploration of purpose as detached from the college experience.

The Interfaith Diversity Experience and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS), a national study of student spirituality (Mayhew et al., 2016), has as its goal to gauge the affinity of college students’ interreligious cooperation, their appreciation for the worldview of others, and their expectations of higher education institutions in regard to religious diversity. This study examined a fall 2015 cohort of 20,436 students attending 122 United States Colleges and Universities. For the initial study, 41% of the sample attended a public institution. The identified worldview is 55% worldview majority (Christian), 28% non-religious, 16% worldview minority (Hindu, Muslim, and Native American, for example), and 2% identifying with another worldview. Through another lens, 41% described themselves as ‘both religious and spiritual,

26% as ‘spiritual, but not religious,’ 22% as ‘neither religious, nor spiritual,’ and 11% as ‘religious, but not spiritual.’ Nearly half of the sample stated they committed to their worldview without having explored others. Not surprisingly, family background and traditions were listed as major influencers by 73% of the respondents. Religious belief/faith accounted for 49%, and cultural background and traditions constituted 36%.

The most generalized finding is that although students express positive regard for interfaith cooperation, they do not have experience practice (Mayhew et al., 2016). Given this, 83% insisted it is ‘important’ their campus provide a welcoming environment for students from diverse religious and nonreligious perspectives. This is similar to their expectation the institution welcome those of various races/ethnicities (89%), sexual orientations and gender identities (77%). Students also expect institutions to provide opportunities to meaningfully interact with students from other perspectives. Given this, colleges must be prepared to engage in conversations around religious identity (Mayhew et al., 2016).

Spirituality and Well-being

Religion and worldview are rarely included in higher education research and assessment (Felix & Bowman, 2015). But several studies have identified a connection between students’ spiritual engagement and positive academic performance (Astin et al., 2011). Astin et al. (2011) found a positive correlation between spirituality, identity development, satisfaction with social life, psychological well-being and a positive college experience overall. Means and Jaeger (2016) cited spirituality as one way to integrate a student’s passions and a source of motivation. Herndon (2010) found spirituality provided a sense of purpose for male African American college students. Byron and Miller-Perrin (2009) explored the connection between faith, life

purpose, and well-being. Their study confirmed previous ones which asserted faith fostered life purpose, and life purpose enhanced well-being. Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) reported religion as one of the strongest predictors of current happiness among 500 undergraduate students. Some maladaptive behaviors, such as partying, decreased in students who identified as religious. Luquis, Brelsford, and Rojas-Guyler (2012) found both male and female college students' sexual behaviors and attitudes were influenced by their spirituality.

Rowold (2011) reported personal spiritual well-being was significantly related to subsequent happiness, psychological well-being, and lower levels of stress, while Pardini, Plante, Sherman, and Stump (2000) found adults who expressed higher levels of spirituality also had increased resilience to stress, lower levels of anxiety, greater perceived social support, and an optimistic life orientation. Hill and Turiano (2014) noted identifying a life purpose during the college years positively correlated to longevity in adulthood.

Niehaus and Rivera (2016) cited several studies that connect spirituality with well-being, including improved self-esteem, more frequent exercise, and participation in cultural events. Astin et al. (2011) and Bowman and Small (2012) noted gains in general well-being. In addition, Fife, Adegoke, McCoy, and Brewer (2011) found religious commitment, along with social support, were significant predictors of life satisfaction, exclusive of gender or race.

However, Park and Millora (2010) found religious struggle and spiritual quest, often measures of feeling conflicted about spirituality, had a negative effect on personal well-being, sometimes leading to stress and depression, especially if these struggles alienated them from their community. Issues of spirituality can impact a student's well-being, especially as they struggle to identify and solidify their adult beliefs. The authors suggested the importance of

student affairs professionals being willing to support students during this time. They reported "internal struggles, quests, and debates that students are processing concerning religion and spirituality have strong implications for their mental health" (p. 457). They continued by stating there is a "need for college and university staff to be more aware of the role that religion and spirituality often play in student development, sense of self, and wellness" (p. 457).

Park's theory paralleled D'Augelli's Homosexual Identity Development in a qualitative study by Hinrichs (2009), but individuals advanced in one developmental identity before being able to progress in the other. Jarrell (2009) found spiritual identity to be a factor in the persistence of non-traditional community and technical college women. Means and Jaeger (2016) asserted LGBT students have unique challenges in college, and spirituality supported the integration of their various identities.

Spirituality and Social Justice

Higher education can support religious expression without the difficult process of creating true religious pluralism, defined by Guest, Sharma Aune, and Warner (2013) as seeing that "all religions are equally valid and equally true" (p. 207). America is one of the most "highly religious nations in the world, and perhaps, paradoxically, Americans are also, as a whole, remarkably, illiterate about religion" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 59).

Christian students may not always find an overtly supportive environment on a public campus for their faith but are provided the structure to practice their beliefs in a context that both understands and makes allowances to maintain their religious practices, normalizing Christian privilege (Fairchild, 2009; Felix & Bowman, 2015; Schlosser, 2013; Shahjahan & Barker, 2009). This privilege is defined as the conscious and subconscious advantages often afforded to those

who practice the Christian faith (Shahjahan & Barker, 2009). It is often seen in norms that pass for secular standards, and revealed in ceremonial traditions, language, dress, assumptions, informal norms, and the academic calendar (Blumenfeld, 2013). This "Christian hegemony," or "a society's unacknowledged adherence to holy days, and sacred spaces, at the expense of the non-Christian" (Adams & Joshi, 2013, p. 230), permeate all institutions, including higher education. Religion serves to provide "an additional layer of socially complex structures to those visually and culturally identified through racial/ethnic differences" (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010, p. 136).

Those outside the Christian religion perceive colleges and universities maintain the status quo, marginalizing those who practice a minority religion or are atheists (Mueller, 2012; Small, 2011). As Small (2011) stated, "Students from minority faith backgrounds may come to college already knowing that they do not fit in with the dominant perspectives in society" (p. 126). Belongingness is especially important when students experience alienation, marginalization and isolation (Strayhorn, 2012). Small (2011) challenged higher education professionals to have the responsibility for "raising their own awareness of how Christian privilege permeates their institutions" (p. 130). Institutions, even on a secular campus, must move beyond a simple legal interpretation of the separation between religion and the state to support all students. This will necessitate the curricular and co-curricular areas of the college create opportunities for students to develop their spiritual identities (Shahjahan & Barker, 2009). Higher education, and student affairs practitioners can no longer "behave as though there is one unified religious voice on their campuses" (Small, 2015, p. 171). Shahjahan (2010) declared:

> Faculty, students, and administrators need to go beyond engaging in dialogues about the diversity of spirituality traditions, inter-faith dialogues, and/or individualistic spirituality to discuss how the social power relations that exist among different traditions on campus, whose conceptualizations of spirituality are privileged within campus, and to examine how spirituality is also a social endeavor. (p. 505)

Small (2011) identified a three-tiered structure of religious privilege. At the top are Christians, those who represent the mainstream views of the United States and create norms. The middle tier consists of other groups who have commonalities with Christianity. Minority religious students, including Jews (Goren, 2014), Muslims, Seventh Day Adventists, and Mormons (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2014), often do not feel welcomed, even on a public campus. The bottom tier are agnostic/atheist students. These disempowered students see their status as "minorities in a country full of religiously committed people" (Small, 2011, p. 65) and wonder if they have any place on campus (Mueller, 2012; Small, 2011). There is limited research on non-Christian religious college students (Siner, 2015), but studies noted atheist students keep their worldview to themselves to avoid criticism from faculty, staff, and religious students (Fairchild & Blumenfeld, 2007; Mueller, 2012; Small, 2011).

Researchers noted a relationship between white privilege and Christian privilege (Goren, 2014; Guest et.al, 2013). Kaye/Kantrowitz (2013) stated, "Christian, like white, is an unmarked category in need of marking" (p. 292). Goren (2014) stated there is a "general lack of awareness of, and even indifference toward, religious privilege" (p. 128).

Since many students are racial and ethnic minorities as well as religious minorities, or "double minorities," they can experience compounded feelings of being the "other" and the

exclusion that entails (Joshi, 2013). These students' identities "color both how a student is perceived by others and how he responds to such perceptions" (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2013, p. 304). Marginalization on campus mirrors their exclusion from the benefits of society as well (Goren, 2014), as they function on a campus that does not acknowledge their holy days and often does not include faculty and staff mentors from their religion (Small, 2011).

Educating the campus community about specific religions and atheism, along with Christian privilege, enhances the campus climate (Mueller, 2012). Student organizations for various religions, as well as a Secular Student Alliance organization, provide students a place to call home (Mueller, 2012). Faculty and staff should be aware of how students' beliefs and practices may impact their class attendance, participation, and performance and be willing to provide appropriate accommodations (Whittaker, Salend, & Elhoweris, 2013). Student Affairs practitioners can make a positive difference in the lives of students as they become aware of their own biases and beliefs (Fairchild, 2009). Furthermore, practitioners can foster and enlarge conversations about religious privilege (Fairchild, 2009). The ACPA and NASPA Professional Competency Areas (2015) include Social Justice and Inclusion. A sub-set of that competency seeks to "Foster and promote an institutional culture that supports the free and open expression of ideas, identities and beliefs" (p. 31). Mayhew et al. (2016) found in a major study of student worldview attitudes over half of students surveyed reported highly appreciative attitudes towards Buddhists, Jews, and Evangelical Christians, but less than half felt the same way about atheists, Hindus, Muslims, and Mormons. Small (2011) explained, "When people feel marginalized in their surroundings, they are less likely to engage in positive and knowledge-building interactions with others" (p. 115).

It is important for college campus leadership to recognize "creating spaces and ways of incorporating and acknowledging multiplicity of identity and ensuring that individuals and groups matter is essential" (Smith, 2015, p. 273). Incorporating religion into diversity initiatives expands the campus's ability to engage in broader social justice conversations.

The challenge is how to support students' spiritual identity in a way that advances the social justice goal of providing equity for all. Small (2011) stated:

> To act morally as educators, we can no longer overlook vast swathes of our student population. To treat all students equitably, we should be willing to open our awareness to ways of being in the world that do not operate out of a place of Christian dominance. (p.154)

Small (2011) asserted, "Working with college students incorporates the imperative to honor the unique contributions of a myriad of faith perspectives and to dismantle the continued social injustice of Christian privilege on college campuses" (p. 60). She claimed many student affairs practitioners may not view spirituality as a frame for privilege and marginalization. Bowman and Small (2013) found when institutions acknowledged students' spiritual identity, students experienced spiritual growth. However, without support, the college experience exacerbated feelings of marginalization and decreased spiritual development for religious minority students.

Summary of the Section

This section elaborated on spirituality and college students, the connection between spirituality and well-being, and finally, the role of spirituality in addressing social justice issues. The growing number of students who identify as spiritual, but not religious, and those who

identify as atheist or agnostic was noted. The role of student affairs practitioners in responding to student identity development was emphasized.

Chapter Summary

Highlights from this woven review of the literature demonstrated a renewed interest in spirituality by students from all backgrounds and belief systems and institutional engagement produced positive outcomes for students (Waggoner, 2016). But the staff of many universities have yet to identify effective ways to assist students in understanding and expressing their beliefs. William M. Sullivan, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, claimed "to live in America is to live in a religiously charged atmosphere, and that includes colleges-whether they like it or not" (Kaplan, 2006, p. 2). Jacobson and Jacobson (2012) noted:

> Paying attention to religion in higher education today is not at all a matter of imposing faith or morality on anyone, it is a matter of responding intellectually to the questions of life that students find themselves necessarily asking as they try to make sense of themselves and the world in an era of ever-increasing social, intellectual, and religious complexity. (p. 30)

Chapter III will outline the methodology used for this study. It will also explain the basic elements and rationale of qualitative research.

Chapter III: Methodology

The previous chapter provided a thorough review of the relevant literature related to student affairs practitioners' conversations with college students regarding spirituality. The chapter began by defining terms used for the study. The relationship between higher education and religion, which has evolved as American society, institutions, and college students have changed was discussed. The role of student affairs practitioners as promoters of holistic student development and the ways research and practice have supported that development was explored. The concepts of transformational learning, mentoring communities, the importance of conversations, and the challenge of the first amendment were examined. Theoretical frameworks of moral and cognitive development that paved the way for spiritual development theories, which form the theoretical framework for the study, were explored. Finally, the characteristics, spiritual identities, and needs of today's college students through a social justice lens was discussed.

The specific qualitative methodology used to explore student affairs practitioners' spirituality at work and their conversations with students are explained in this chapter. An overview of and the rationale for the methodological framework for the study follows a description of the population and the sample selection. The research questions, methods and rationale for data collection, and process of analysis are presented. The trustworthiness, assumptions, ethic and confidentiality of the study, and my bias as the researcher conclude the chapter.

Overview and Rationale of Qualitative Research

Qualitative methods have only recently been formalized (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011). There is no definitive definition of qualitative

research, nor is there a "distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 9). Rather, qualitative researchers use a variety of techniques and methods, tailored to the objectives of the research topic (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Denzin & Giardina, 2008). Qualitative research explores personal experience and introspection, seeking answers that illuminate how social experiences are created and the meaning they are given, which allow the research to "make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). Denzin (2010) asserted that, "properly conceptualized, qualitative inquiry becomes a civic, participatory, collaborative project. It turns researchers and subjects into co-participants in a common moral project" (p. 28). Furthermore, Brinkman and Kvale (2015) explained, "the qualitative stance involves focusing on the cultural, every day, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowing, acting, and ways of understanding ourselves as persons . . . " (p. 15).

Several metaphors illustrate qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) likened a qualitative researcher to a quilter, who "stitches, edits and puts slices of reality together" (p. 7). They explained the qualitative researcher resembles a montage, or a "set of fluid, interconnected images and representations" (p. 8). Even the odds and ends—the little pieces left over from the various voices, experiences, and perspectives—have a role in creating a "psychological and emotional unity-a pattern" (p. 7). Richardson and St. Pierre visualized qualitative research as a prism, with overlapping and contradictory paradigms (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 7).

The purpose of qualitative research is to "make the invisible more visible . . ." (Denzin, 2010, p. 32). It "challenges existing understandings and arguments and offers new insights… interpretations persons can use to change their everyday worlds" (Denzin, 2010, p. 49).

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) explained qualitative research provides insight into "what people themselves tell about their lived world" (p. 1).

For this study, qualitative research methods enabled participants to explore their lived experiences through a narrative approach—to elicit the stories individuals share (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2008; Josselson, 2011). Given the subjective nature of spirituality and the personal experience of incorporating it into student affairs practitioners' work, qualitative research was the method best suited for this exploratory study. Having provided a description of and rational for qualitative research, this section discusses the specific research questions.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of student affairs practitioners regarding spirituality in their work. Specifically, the following questions were addressed:

1. How do student affairs practitioners integrate their spirituality into their work?
2. To what extent do student affairs practitioners bring their authentic self to work?
3. What factors influence student affairs practitioners' conversations with students regarding spirituality?

The study method to address these questions is detailed in the remainder of the chapter. The following section describes the population for the study, outlines the participant criteria, and details the selection process.

Description of the Population

This study explored student affairs practitioners' authentic self and conversations with students regarding spirituality. As established in the previous chapter, student affairs

practitioners often serve as mentors for students who attend college expecting college personnel will engage them on spiritual issues. In a public or secular institution, this expectation often goes unfulfilled. Therefore, this study explored issues encountered by these critical professionals as they work with students' spiritual development.

Sample Selection

The methods to identify and obtain participants for the study are described in this section. While the number of participants required to achieve saturation for this study was not pre-determined (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Tracy, 2013), 10 current student affairs practitioners from five public colleges and universities in a state in the upper Midwest served as participants. Choosing one state in which to conduct the study allowed for in-person interviews while permitting participants to come from a variety of public higher education institution. The participants were diverse in gender, age, student affairs experience, faith background and practices, and racial and ethnic identities, creating a purposeful sample that "fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals, and purposes" (Tracy, 2013, p. 134). The methods used to identify and secure participants for the study are described in the next section.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) explained that "Qualitative research interviews give voice to people in expressing their opinions, hopes, and worries in their own words" (p. 352). The study drew from several purposefully-sampled sources, collecting data from those who had the best knowledge of the research topic and recruited participants who were willing to share their experiences on the study topic (Tracy, 2013). First, recommendations from my professional network were solicited. During interviews, participants were asked for recommendations of

others who met the study criteria. This snowball sampling method of securing participants entailed soliciting participants to enlist others (Tracy, 2013).

From suggested names, participants who fulfilled the attributes of the study were chosen. Maximum variation in the sample was important, especially regarding underrepresented or marginalized worldviews, namely, those perspectives which are not always heard (Tracy, 2013).

Prospective participants were contacted via phone or email. I explained the purpose of the study, outlined the criteria, and ascertained their interest in participation. Questions concerning the study were addressed. If an individual agreed to participate, an initial interview, at the time and place of the participant's choosing was arranged. Participants reviewed the consent form (see Appendix A) in advance to assure they were fully informed regarding the purpose of the study, expectations of confidentiality, and risks of participation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Fontana & Prokos, 2007). Questions or concerns were addressed prior to commencing the initial interview. Participants were also verbally informed they could decline to answer any question, revise the interview transcript, or withdraw from the study at any time.

To ensure participants were comfortable sharing their experiences without hesitation or concern for risk, steps were taken to preserve their confidentiality. Each participant was given a pseudonym following the completion of the interview. During the transcription process, the participant's name was replaced in the transcript with the pseudonym. In addition, any mention of the participant's institutional name, department or other identifying information during the interview was generalized with terms, such as institution, department, and position, to further maintain confidentiality.

Data Collection

The focus of data collection was the in-person interviews, which evaluated the participants' understanding and practices regarding their authentic self at work and conversations with students about spirituality. Participants were asked to reflect on their own spirituality and the role it has in their work and specifically, their conversations with students. In-person interviews, the most common form of interviewing, are widely accepted as a basic method of obtaining data for qualitative research (Fontana & Prokos, 2007). The interviews followed a semi-structured design, meaning subjects had the flexibility to focus the topic on their "motivations, experiences, and behaviors" (Tracy, 2013, p. 141). An interview guide (see Appendix B), was developed based on previous scholarship and provided initial structure, but there was an "openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up on the specific answers given and the stories told by subjects" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 150).

Several questions on each of the research questions for the study, including both open-ended and closed-ended elements, comprised the interview guide (see Appendix B). Probing questions were utilized as needed. In this way, the interview had an initial framework but also reflected the uniqueness of each participant's experience, as qualitative research, by its nature, includes design flexibility (Fontana & Prokos, 2007; Tracy, 2013).

Each interview was unique in that the participants' responses provided direction and depth to the topics discussed. The interview questions evolved as the study progressed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Tracy, 2013). Ten current student affairs practitioners from public colleges and universities in an upper Midwest state were selected as participants. Choosing one state to conduct the study enabled in-person interviews and yet permitted participants to come

from a variety of public higher education institutions. Diversity in gender, age, spirituality, as well as racial and ethnic identities enhanced the generalizability of the findings. The criteria for participation provided a purposeful sample that "fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals, and purposes" (Tracy, 2013, p. 134).

Upon completion of this study, my understanding of relevant issues was broadened, and new dimensions of the research topic were discovered—hallmarks of an exploratory study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The questions explored respondents' participants' interpretations and meanings while producing rich data through a thick description of lived experiences (Tracy, 2013).

Knowledge was constructed as the participant and I interacted on the research topic and I obtained an "inter-view" of their life (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This enabled me to form a description of and interpret the meaning of the study phenomena. Initial interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes in length and were digitally recorded. To increase trustworthiness and provide additional data, extensive field notes were taken. I reviewed the digital recordings and transcripts and noted comments and observations. I also compiled relevant thoughts and impressions concerning the topic throughout the study process. Data collection was concluded upon reaching saturation (Tracy, 2013).

Shortly after each interview, I reviewed and refined the field notes. The digital recording was transcribed verbatim, and I fact checked it by comparison with the field notes. Each interview was copied to an audio disc (CD) and kept in my safe to preserve the confidentiality of the participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Tracy, 2013). Participants were assigned a pseudonym during transcription to assure confidentiality of their information. Any connection

between participants and their pseudonym was known only to the transcriptionist and me. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, who signed a confidentiality agreement prior to having access to the study data. All interview recordings and transcriptions were shared between the transcriptionist and I through a password protected, confidential account for which only we had access.

While initial interviews were conducted in person, additional questions were asked through email to achieve theoretical saturation of explored topics with each participant. Participants were made aware as interviews progressed, additional questions may be added—a process which is essential to an evolving study (Punch, 2009). Participants were provided an electronic version of their interview transcript and asked follow-up questions. They were also requested to provide feedback on their interview to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Tracy, 2013). Participants were also given an update of the study timeline.

The transcripts, CDs, and other study materials will be destroyed three years after the completion of my degree. Having outlined the specific interview and data collection procedures to be used for the study, the next section focuses on the specific methods used in analyzing the data collected. Three levels of data analysis were used to form themes and findings for the study.

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the data began during data collection, so that the conclusions would reflect the emerging themes. I was guided in the study by reading field notes, reviewing the transcripts, and listening to the digital recordings, which gave me a broad spectrum of initial information. I reviewed the transcript several times and listened to the digital recording for each

interview to become familiar with the data prior to analysis. I used an inductive approach, which involves analyzing the data with higher and higher levels of abstraction.

After familiarization with the data, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested three levels of analysis to provide the classification scheme: meaning coding, meaning condensation, and finally, meaning interpretation. By using several layers of analysis, conceptualizations of the interview data provided thick description of the research topic (Tracy, 2013). Further explanation of the meaning analysis used in this study is detailed below.

Meaning Coding

After participants were afforded the opportunity to review their interview for accuracy and revision, the transcript was used to conduct a first-level, or meaning code analysis, of emerging themes, patterns, and directions. This initial, line by line, descriptive coding involved placing tags, names, or labels on the data. In this type of holistic coding, the data was examined in sentences or even paragraphs, and a summary word or phrase was chosen to represent the data's meaning (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

This inductive approach to analysis created an initial framework based on participant responses rather than imposing predetermined categories and is the "most widespread approach" to data analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 224). When more than one participant mentioned a topic, it was noted as an emerging theme. Throughout the study, I identified both areas of convergence and data which diverged from the developing norm (Tracy, 2013).

After identification of the initial themes, the data was cut and pasted onto note cards and coded by theme. Each code had a two to four-word phrase representing a key idea, concept, or

topic with a code for each of the interview questions and one for each of the themes that emerged during the initial analysis (Tracy, 2013).

Meaning Condensation

Initial coding of the interview data assisted in the creation of inferential codes to explain, interpret, analyze, and create units of information. A second round of analysis to identify the dominant codes for this study was then conducted (Tracy, 2013). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) termed this level of analysis meaning condensation, which condenses and focuses the interview data. There are two purposes for condensation analysis. First, it provided the beginning conceptualization of themes and patterns based on the interview data, and second, it suggested topics and probes to be explored in follow-up questions. This level of analysis was used to pull disparate parts together to identify patterns and elements that have the greatest salience. Although there is criticism that assigning codes limits the participants' complex thoughts to a single category, condensation analysis is nevertheless considered advantageous in understanding large amounts of interview data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

In this process, the meaning coding subsets within the largest meta-code categories were re-classified into either existing codes or new sub-codes. Overarching themes emerged from this analysis. When all the interview data had been coded, the cards for each theme were analyzed, providing a general overview of the study data and a check as to the accuracy and completeness of the codes encompassing the entirety of the interview data. The final step of analysis was meaning interpretation.

Meaning Interpretation

For meaning interpretation. I identified categories which described groups of similar codes within sub-sets to create a holistic narrative for each participant (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Robinson & Glanzer, 2016). When all 10 interviews were conducted, member-checked and coded, final themes were created. The increasing abstraction of the codes formed the core story and themes. These themes, along with the research questions, comprised the findings of the study.

Trustworthiness

The following are the trustworthiness and reliability measures used for this study. While some qualitative researchers have minimized their importance, there are nevertheless accepted qualitative research methods which strengthen confidence in the study findings. Reliability speaks to the trustworthiness of the findings, in that the study explored the subjects it intended to (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Qualitative research, when done with attention to each step of the process, creates an accurate, credible, and trustworthy version of the lived reality of the participant. To further strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, I conducted an intensive review of relevant literature to further develop a theoretical basis for the data collected, support the study claims, and provide context for the participants' perceptions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Creating and reviewing field notes and maintaining an audit trail logbook of key decisions, observations, and reflections throughout the study added to the knowledge generated and further refined the study data, common methods of supporting the reliability of a study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Having participants review their interview, or member checking, is frequently used to strengthen trustworthiness in qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Another confidence method is utilization of the three reviews of the raw data and themes: meaning coding, meaning interpretation, and meaning condensation. This layering of coding allowed for multiple understandings of the data to be discovered (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Assumptions of the Study

Several assumptions were made regarding this study. First, it was assumed that participants provided truthful answers, based on their knowledge and personal experience. Participants were assumed to be able to articulate their worldview and understand how they expressed their authentic self in their work. It was also assumed that the student affairs practitioners strived to educate the whole student, and that conversations with students and the broader task of mentoring students was a critical element of their work.

Ethics and Confidentiality

The St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and my dissertation committee approved the study before interviews commenced. To ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in this study were adequately protected, all requirements set forth by the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board were strictly adhered to. No discomforts or risks involved with participation were expressed by any of the participants. The terms of modified consent, presented in the consent form (see Appendix A) allowed for informed and voluntary participation before, during, and after the interview.

Researcher Bias

The nature of qualitative research implies that there is an "intimate relationship" between the researcher and the subject of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Tracy (2013) spoke to the self-reflexivity of qualitative research and the ways "the researchers' past experiences, points of view, and roles impact those same researchers' interactions with and interpretation of, the research scene" (p. 2). Denzin (2010) reminded us that "all inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer" (p. 24) and therefore, "researchers must make their own value positions clear, including the so-called facts and ideological assumptions that they attach to these positions" (p. 28).

I undertook this study fully aware that I would filter the data through my own experiences, interpretations, and perceptions, including having a traditional Christian faith background, believing in the importance of engaging students at a deep level in student affairs work, and supporting a role for spirituality identity development on secular college campuses. I see spiritual identity as an essential component of holistic student development. These biases may have caused me to over or underemphasize the meaning of participant statements.

Some of the ways I see the world stems from my daily work in student affairs, where I meet students who do not have adequate coping mechanisms when they experience loss, uncertainty, fear, and hopelessness. As a student affairs practitioner, I seek to know how and when to engage students in conversations of spirituality as a source of support for their challenges and identity development. I have personally experienced the power and strength of having a strong belief system during difficult times and vividly remember the process of questioning, challenging, and embracing spiritual beliefs during my college years.

Lastly, my bias is toward viewing qualitative research as the method that can best garner rich data on spirituality. My tendency is to see the world through multiple perspectives and to search for patterns and meanings, acknowledging that there are many valid views. The metaphor of the qualitative researcher as a quilter also resonates with me, as my grandmother lovingly stitched quilts by hand, often using bits and pieces of leftover material from outgrown clothes or garage-sale-finds tossed off by others. The concept of finding value, meaning, and purpose in even the smallest things is consistent with qualitative research methods, specifically that of bricolage, or "something put together using whatever tools happen to be available, even if the tools were not designed for the task at hand. An eclectic form of gathering information that assists in bringing out patterns and connections" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a basis for qualitative research methods as "valid descriptions of the qualitative human world" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 341). It outlined the design and methods of this study; specifically, qualitative research as a valid approach, the process of and rationale for the selection of participants, the methods used for data collection and analysis, trustworthiness and reliability for the study, the process of Institutional Review Board approval, and finally, my bias as the researcher.

The purpose of this study was to better understand how student affairs practitioners bring their authentic spiritual self to their work and the factors that determine if, and how they engage in spiritual conversations with students. I hope the findings will inform practitioners, faculty in student affairs graduate programs, and institutions as to how they can more effectively meet the spiritual development needs of their students. Chapter IV shares the results of data collection and

analysis to provide the findings of the study. Chapter V outlines recommendations based on the findings to inform future research and current practices.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study generated from individual interviews with ten student affairs practitioners, who served as participants. The purpose of this study was to explore how the spiritual beliefs of student affairs practitioners manifest in their work, and specifically, how it influenced their spiritual identity conversations with students. The findings of the study will be discussed in two sections. First, the participants are introduced, providing context to their voice in the remaining section of the chapter. The remainder of the chapter details the themes which emerged from the study data.

Overview of Participants

Ten current student affairs practitioners comprised participants for this study. They were chosen for their potential to be information-rich sources, in that each possessed from 4 to over 25 years of student affairs experience (Table 1). Soliciting participation from those with a broad range of tenure in student affairs provided a variety of perspectives from entry-level professionals to seasoned practitioners in leadership positions.

At the time of the interview, participants were employed in a student affairs position at a two- or four-year public institution, representing five unique colleges or universities in a Midwestern state. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to respect confidentiality while allowing their individual voices to be heard throughout the findings.

Table 1

Student Affairs Experience of Study Participants

Name of Participant	Years of Student Affairs Experience
Carl	11-15
Amy	11-15
Marilyn	21+
Kristine	11-15
Larry	21+
Merinda	11-15
Scott	16-20
Sherry	Less than 10
Brian	11-15
Jada	Less than 10

Note. Participant names are pseudonyms used for the study.

While Table 1 provides important information on the professional experience of the participants, another key factor in understanding practitioners' perspective is to know the areas of student affairs practice they have worked in. Three participants had experience in one functional area, and the remaining had multiple student affairs positions. During the interview, participants referred to the entirety of their experience in student affairs, which often encompassed diverse functional responsibilities and positions at two- and four-year public, private, and proprietary institutions (Table 2).

Five participants held prior professional positions outside of education, which they contrasted with their higher education experiences. For this reason, demographics typically

reported, such as current position and institution, were not relevant for this study. Cumulative years of student affairs practice provided an understanding of the tenure of the study participants and are listed in Table 1. Student affairs is comprised of several broad functional areas. Table 2 provides a snapshot of participants' work experience. Racial and ethnic demographics were not reported for this study to assure confidentiality, but participants' stories of belonging to an identity group was preserved when it added context to their thoughts.

Table 2

Areas of Student Affairs Experience

Area	Years of Experience
Conduct	5
Department or Program Leadership	6
Identity Support	5
Student Activities	3
Residential Life	5

Note. Experience is defined as a Graduate Assistantship or at least one year in a professional position

Overview of Findings

Each participant shared how their childhood faith experiences influenced their current beliefs, and reflected on the childhood values, traditions, and ideals they continue to practice. An open and positive relationship with colleagues influences the work environment. When asked about the support participants felt from their colleagues and supervisors in expressing their spirituality or having spiritual development conversations with students, the answers were very diverse. While some participants felt they could discuss their personal beliefs, others thought doing so would have a negative impact on their reputation. Those who identified as practicing a

traditional Christian denomination provided several examples when their beliefs were discussed negatively by others at the institution. These participants also indicated the cultural climate at their institution was negatively biased towards their faith.

It was evident that even those who felt comfortable discussing spiritual development with students did not often incorporate those conversations into their work; as spirituality was not a central perspective of the way they perceived students. This was especially pronounced with practitioners who worked primarily with other identities, such as sexual orientation, gender, race or ethnicity. For those practitioners, their commitment to assisting students through a social justice lens was paramount, and spiritual development was an auxiliary identity.

The following section provides detailed responses from the participants around the topics of the study's research questions. The section begins with their recollections of childhood.

Childhood Beliefs and Practices

To provide background on their life story, participants shared their childhood beliefs. Most were raised in a Christian denomination, many as Catholic or Lutheran, denominations predominant in the Midwest. Scott described his childhood message of, "Catholics were good and everything else was evil—not evil, but I couldn't even talk to a Lutheran." Brian recalled attending Catholic school where:

> Religion was very much a part of my life every day for that time. My parents let us know that God is a big part of life…if we do good, God will give us good things, and if we do bad, bad things will happen.

Marilyn's family was also Catholic, "I learned all about loving your neighbor and caring for one another and caring about your community." Larry vividly recalled his first communion

and catechism. Jada remarked, “I grew up in the church…we went to church almost every Sunday.” Amy shared that she had been bullied in elementary school and chose to respond by “praying for others. It was something that really stuck with me, and I felt like my prayers were really being heard.” Kristine reflected:

> I was very much raised secular. I think we went to the Episcopal church for Christmas Eve for like the little figurines . . . that was part of the tradition until I got old enough that I didn’t think it was cool anymore, and then we stopped.

Other participants recalled adolescence as their first awareness of their own beliefs, sometimes questioning their childhood faith. Larry reflected, “I kind of drifted away from the church. It wasn’t like I was this strong Christian.” Amy remembered she “went through the motions without even really knowing why.” Sherry recollected, “Growing up we went to church and having something bigger than myself to look up to. Throughout high school I kind of lost that, I think, a bit.” Kristine vividly remembered her high school world religion class:

> For the first time I was hearing about things like Hinduism and animalism, paganism, Confucianism, all of the old standards, you know? I loved how it was connected to culture and different peoples and how different societies make sense of the world. And I remember getting super excited and just being like, I’m going to search every religion, philosophy, belief system.

Spirituality in College and Emerging Adulthood

Fowler (1981), Parks (2011), and Small (2011) identified the college years as ones in which young adults are beginning to lay the foundation of their adult lives, including their beliefs. An integral part of that process is questioning childhood values and beliefs. The college

environment can support this re-examination through both curricular and co-curricular opportunities to discuss religion and spirituality (Parks, 2011; Small 2011). Sherry remembered discussions with her college roommates, "Not that I think that was our focus in college that we got to church every Sunday or had those conversations, but I think it helped me to recognize what was more important." Amy recalled at her private college she still went through the motions of her faith. "You know, did the things that I knew I needed to do." Jada's small, private college was "rooted in kind of the church and religious aspects. And so, I became a little more, I guess, open to religion." College broadened Merinda's religious views:

> I would say as a young person I had a narrow view of God and it fit in a very small type of definition, and I thought there was only one way. And then in studying religion, I realized that God is really big, and He exists in a lot of different ways.

Brian did not find a place for religion during college. Larry was learning more about Native Spirituality and asked himself, "Do I consider myself a traditional Indian and give up on the Christian way of life?" These changes were echoed by Jada:

> And so that was kind of that defining moment where I had to figure out like who are my core friends going to be, who I was going to be as a person, and then how did all those religious and core beliefs tie into who I wanted to eventually be later in life?

Merinda was "finding my own journey with spirituality."

In graduate school, Jada came to realize that some of her childhood beliefs no longer fit how she saw the world, and it was "hard tying those things together. But I still held my core beliefs to be true, to be accepting of all people and to learn about other people's cultures and religions."

Participants easily identified the values they retained from their childhood beliefs. Brian discussed the importance of hard work several times during the interview, a core value in his family. As a first generation, black male, with immigrant parents, he emphasized, "It goes back to my upbringing, it really does." He added:

> By no means will I say I'm religious, however, I will say the values I learned through religion keep staying with me today, and that's loving people, showing genuine care, providing support, giving your time to support people and to help them move along in the world.

Jada noted:

> I was trying to find my own religious background…I always hold that near and dear to my heart. But it's not something that I've kind of put in the forefront almost, but I've put other things that I've learned either from my religious background or from my family situation.

Similarly, Scott learned the value of hard work, "Live each day as your last; but live it with importance."

Several participants shared Merinda's thoughts: "Treating others the way that you want to be treated was . . . a high perspective in my family, if you want good things to come back to you, you have to treat others the right way." Marilyn put it this way:

> I think I've always just really cared about people and helping them to kind of figure out their lives and have better lives. So, I think that's my…motivating factor. Like I really, I guess, bought into it, about the whole idea that there's a creator and that we're all here to enjoy our life, but to help people who are hurting.

In general, participants recalled expanding their view of religion and spirituality as they got older. Brian explained, "I didn't come to agree with a lot of religious things as I developed as an adult." He described his transition from a traditional view of God to "this notion of a higher power, and if you want to call it, as I've learned, Allah, or Judah, or Buddha." Merinda, from a traditional religious background, expressed:

> You can find spirituality in a lot of areas of everyday life. You can think of almost anything in life . . . something people do or a tradition, and in some ways there's some aspects of religion functioning for them in those things…now I can see religion in just about anything and everything.

Jada discussed perspective:

> And I think that goes back to seeing things, being able to see things from a different lens, and maybe that's where this all comes from, being able to step out from within experiences to be able to be open to new experiences.

Current Belief System

Participants explained the belief system they now espouse. Sherry was quick to share that church and religious beliefs are very important to her. She spoke to the ways she strives to live out her faith in everyday life, including how she raises her children. "It's really important to know that there's something they will follow throughout their lives and we can do our best to help them do that." While Amy has always identified with Christianity, the loss of a loved one several years ago "happened in such a way that made me believe there is definitely this higher power, because when I believe . . . there's this overwhelming peace that I have in my life." She started listening to podcasts and Christian music, and

> It all started to click, it completely changed who I am. So, as I would go through the motions at mass, now I sit there, and I listen to every reading, every scripture, and I see how it applies to my life. What meaning can I take from this? How can I learn from this? How can I grow? How can I instill this in my home?

Larry spoke to the practice of prayer:

> I pray in both languages, and I pray my prayers that I've learned in Ojibway, and I pray in English the prayers I learned from the Catholic Church every day. Every day. I need to do this to keep me straight, maintain my values, my integrity, by doing things the right way.

But he also labeled himself a Chris-Easter, "We may go to church on Christmas and Easter. If our kids are here, and they want to go, we'll go; otherwise we don't." Larry is also a part of the Bear Clan but would not share details of his American Indian spiritual practices because they are sacred. He said his identity is in "my guide and my force of who I am, that clan is also innately part of my personality." He continued:

> And that . . . to me, what's important here is not what religion that you follow. More important is that you have faith in a higher power and that Creator. In Native spirituality and Christianity, it's the same God. It's not one is different. It's just a different way of worship, and I happen to combine both.

Marilyn explained:

> My spirituality, to me, is really real, because I've seen things happen because of prayer, and things that I'd almost label as miracles in my own life, and the way life kind of happens and different things that have occurred. And I just . . . I just really believe

> there's more to life than ourselves. I think it's bigger than that. There's a bigger world out there and there's a bigger purpose.

But there are also challenges for those whose sense of self does not align with religion. Carl described:

> How it initially lands for me, when I think of spirituality, I think of religion. And my relationship with religion has been challenged, I think, in different ways. As an openly gay man, I can't –I can't always say that I was openly gay, and I struggled a little bit internally and externally with how to negotiate who I am in the world with my fundamental subscription or belief system in a higher power, and it took a while for me to reconcile some of the hurtful ways in which religion was utilized in a way to, I think, maybe thwart my sense of self or value.

Terms of both religion and spirituality resonated with some participants. Jada commented:

> Probably 50% is…directed towards religious background, and a lot of it is like family beliefs. And so, a lot of it could still be related to religious beliefs, but it comes out in different forms, and I've had my own journey with that.

Amy expressed:

> It's something that I feel like over the past two or three years I've been growing in my spiritual identity. It's something that has always been with me, but it's evolved, and it's changed, and it's taken in different directions, and, you know, all the while with the similar foundation.

Those who identified with spirituality spoke to its role in their life. Amy described:

> Bringing that sense of calm. Like, you can plan. Absolutely you want to have some direction. But you have to allow for that other piece to fall into place, and if you don't give yourself room for that, it's not going to happen. If you cram everything so tight and pack it in, your plans, too much, you won't allow that to come into your life. You won't open…allow the universe to let that in.

She described her daily rituals:

> And I found that when I bring my spirituality into it—and it could be as simple as just being silent driving to work or deep breathing and saying to myself, 'Be still, be still, I am with you'—it's really helped me in my work and in my day to day life.

Brian explained:

> The amount of good that I put forth and how that comes back in good, has a way of paving the way for creating environments in which people feel valued, a big thing in my spirituality. Spirituality can help you keep a focus on all your worlds. And make sure when they collide how you rebound and keep your eye on the most important thing, minute by minute, day-by-day.

Carl identified himself as spiritual as well: "I've found that in the moments where I feel most spiritual, it's when I'm truly connected to the moment and I'm dialed in to what is happening internally, how I'm experiencing the world around me." He explained:

> It's just kind of a fabric that's woven throughout. When I think about spirituality, there was a time where I just didn't really quite- it didn't feel authentic, but once it clicked, it's just there and you can't separate it anymore. It can't be compartmentalized. It's just always there.

A few participants did not resonate with the concept of religion or spirituality, as they defined them. The guiding values Scott espoused are "being able to live life safely and with the basic necessities of life is what drives me. I never thought about having a mission statement, but that's probably what it would be." He elaborated:

> I am trying to articulate . . . there is a huge disconnect between my experiences growing up and where I am now, because of my experiences in higher education. My family has a great deal of prejudice within, and while each one my family members works extremely hard, they have not seen what I have seen. While I have never traveled, the world has come to me. I have seen poverty from every corner of the world, I have known people from every corner of the world, I've been fortunate to be able to see success in ways the rest of my family have not.

After college, Kristine identified with Atheism and Agnosticism:

> Instead engaging with more, I guess, philosophy and piecing together a world view that was based in—oh, god, I love myself some postmodern theory. Yeah. So really taking more of like a sociological/academic/philosophical intake and basing my worldview on that rather than anything that someone else would look at as a religious or spiritual belief system.

Rather, she acknowledged:

> I'm generally a person who's comfortable with a lot of ambiguity, and so some of those questions are not that important to me in terms of-like what is the meaning of life? Well, I don't know, and I don't think I'll ever know.

She preferred to shift the frame of reference to "what can we do while we're here, you know? I don't have a strong drive to sort of define that which lies beyond or anything like that."

All the participants acknowledged that their belief system would not totally align with others' perception. Larry expressed:

> There are those who believe Christianity is the only way of life—the only way…I really believe that all people have a spirituality that …from the beginning of Christ, if you will, for people it was a way of life. And it is still that way for some, but I don't think it's that way for a majority.

Merinda summed it up: "And while I find that to be, you know, rewarding and appealing, I also know that one size doesn't fit everybody. And so, I've found myself to be more of a, oh, liberal in my journey that way."

Childhood experiences, young adult questioning and adopting spiritual beliefs that reflected their authentic self were common aspects of each participant's journey. While each story was unique, they reflected the first theme identified for this study.

Theme 1: Values Represent Spirituality

Because there is no commonly accepted language around spirituality, participants struggled to describe their experiences and beliefs. Most described having traditional religious practices as children but adopted individualized beliefs as adults. While several participants identified with an organized religion, others felt more comfortable identifying themselves as spiritual. Several others aligned as non-believers. However, the values and concepts from their upbringing still influenced how they framed their values and oriented their personal and professional lives. Kristine described:

> I don't consider myself a person of faith. I don't know the exact religious affiliations necessarily of the other folks, but I know that they do practice or are people of faith. But we were able to talk about values. And had a lot of similarities around those values and around how we want to share those values with our students.

Interview data revealed prior experiences impacted the way participants incorporated spirituality into their work. Personal preferences strongly informed practices around spirituality. The next section discussed the lived experience participants in their student affairs work.

Authenticity at Work

The participants' spiritual narratives laid the foundation for a discussion on how their beliefs inform their work in student affairs. The complexity of balancing authenticity with norms, campus culture, formal and informal expectations, along with the sensitive nature of beliefs, makes bringing one's true self to work a challenge. Fears, both from experience and those anticipated, give pause to those who seek to find a place for their spirituality in the collegiate work environment.

One of the most common concerns mentioned by participants was the current political and social climate of mistrust. Labels and stereotypes are easily assigned, even in the allegedly open and inclusive environment of academia. Marilyn was adamant her beliefs were not welcome at her institution:

> There is no way in this—in this institution—that I could ever bring my authentic self. At all. And it's a lot because of people's perceptions of what it means to be a Christian these days. And even I have some of those negative perceptions against Christians, which is

> really sad, but it's true. There's…way more mercy for…there's much more tolerance for people of other faiths than there is for even Christians.

Other participants were conflicted as to how much of themselves they could share at work. Kristine commented:

> I think it's always in the background for me. It's not something that I actually talk with people about a whole lot, although…I make measured choices about naming myself as a nonbeliever in certain settings and certain types of communities.

Sherry put it this way:

> It's a little different being in a professional setting, and it's hard sometimes. You don't want to offend anyone, and you want to keep a good morale among students and in the work environment and show them that you are open to diversity and what that brings in all different areas.

Not giving offense or have others misinterpret their intention was mentioned in almost every interview. Merinda clarified:

> I wouldn't outwardly put anything Biblical—I wouldn't—like I just cited a verse in this interview. I never would have done that with a student . . . I probably wouldn't have any Christian doctrine or anything hanging on the walls of my office, that type of thing. Because I do recognize that when people see things like that, sometimes they can misconstrue it to be something that's exclusive or judgmental or looking to show that's the only accepted way. And that's totally against what I stand for, so I wouldn't want to mislead them in that way.

Marilyn was saddened by missed opportunities:

> You can't say 'Can we pray about that together?' Like, it sounds like you've had a really hard day . . . can I pray for you? Or I won't even say, 'I'm going to pray for you,' because even that could be really offensive to somebody. Sending good thoughts is about as close as you can get . . . otherwise they would think it was an insult or that you were somehow proselytizing them.

Sherry echoed Marilyn's sentiments, and expressed concern that displaying anything faith related in her office might offend students. Merinda mused:

> I would say I have some concerns about being misconstrued…if someone understands me to be a Christian, which I would say generally I am, I wouldn't want them to equate, 'Oh, if she's Christian, then she's Republican'. Or, 'If she's Christian, then she's judgmental.

Amy shared her concerns:

> I do feel a little bit like I have to hide myself from administration and faculty…I fear there's going to be this new kind of backlash because they're going to assume, because I practice the Catholic faith, that I . . . practice every single thing that the Catholic…faith system believes. I feel like I might be judged. So, I'm a little more hesitant. And so, I feel like if I say I'm Catholic, people are going to right away stereotype me and put me in a box.

Concealing beliefs was most acute for those who strongly identified with their spiritual identity. For those with other predominant identities, spirituality was not a consideration. Kristine shared:

> I have other identities that are more in the forefront; my gender identity, my sexuality, my race, my class. And those are probably the ways…that I connect with students and talk with students is probably centered more around those identities.

One way most participants expressed spirituality at work was through their personal principles and values. Merinda explained:

> In my current work I still feel like some of the tenets of my original religious study really come through in how I see things and the way I approach things, and just how my work feels. I would say that, yeah, it sort of feels like a spiritual practice in and of itself.

Marilyn, although strongly stating she cannot bring all her beliefs to work, mused she tries to "be true to my own values of loving and being kind." Kristine observed, "I share a lot of principles and beliefs . . . I really am grounded in humanity and the human experience, and so that's the basis upon which I connect." For Amy, it's about modeling behavior:

> When I see conflict in my work staff, I right away think, 'we're not treating each other as neighbors. We're not treating each other as we should be. We don't have to like everybody. That's okay. But we do have to respect people, and we do have to treat them as though they are a child of God.

But she was quick to add that she does not use the phrase "child of God" at work. Merinda also incorporated her values in her work with students,

> I see myself as a partner to them and as equal to them and knowing that we've all been in situations where we've made mistakes in this common humanity is important in the way that I approach my work . . . this is not a religious tenet, it's more an ethical principle, like the concept of doing no harm.

Sherry expressed it this way:

> I think it's important to have that sense of treating others with respect. When I think about it, I guess, how would . . . you know, God . . . want me to treat others and that's how I go about my daily routine. I want to respect others and to show a sense of hope to others. What gives them meaning and purpose and what gives them joy?

Brian described, "I would say I really take spirituality from the standpoint of 'you need to learn how to be at peace, not just at your workday, but in your whole day.'" Carl's mindset impacted his work, "But I find that, you know, when I commit myself to being present, that there seems to be a little bit more powerful experience, not only for myself, but, I hope, for those that I interact with."

Colleague Support

In any professional position, support from colleagues and supervisors contribute to a positive work environment. Most participants felt they could share their spirituality with co-workers, if there was respect. Scott summed it up, "My worldview is very different from theirs, so how do we learn about each other and how do we work with each other?" Jada mentioned diversity in her office as a strength, and a way to learn from each other. Sherry revealed:

> With colleagues it has come up. We may even have some differing conversation or different opinions about some things, but we are comfortable talking about that. If we have our differences of opinions, I think it just gives us room to have those conversations and [ask] 'what does that mean to you?'

Amy agreed, "Absolutely. I feel very supported. I've never felt anybody say, you know, 'that's your belief and I don't believe that.'" Kristine shared:

> We might talk very generally about how that influences our worldview, but not at length, not in detail . . . not in a way where we're talking about how that's really impacting our work with students. It's just sort of surface level—like, yay pluralism! . . . but we're not really getting to know how that story's impacting us.

According to Sherry, work relationships differ, depending on the person. Larry felt colleagues wanted him to "fight their fight", using spiritual identity to advance their causes. Similarly, when Melinda asked a colleague if she was attending a holiday event, the co-worker exclaimed, "Hell no!" Merinda's frustration was evident:

> And that's not uncommon, seeing a really strong response to something that is centralized around Christianity, Christmas, or Christmas trees or Easter break or anything like that. Just imagine if that was the response to someone going to the Diwali. You wouldn't say 'hell, no.' How offensive. But since Christianity is seen as privileged, it's okay.

Marilyn had a similar experience,

> If you put any other category in what she was saying—you put gay people, you put black people, you put Muslim people—it would have gotten shut down by everyone in that room. But the Christians. Nuh-uh. They get allowed to just be hammered and no one says anything.

She added, "But so often I find myself being the one like, the one lone speaker in a group." Spiritual conversations with supervisors present a different dynamic. Sherry affirmed:

> He knows . . . about my life and I'm comfortable sharing what I did on the weekend, that I have a family, and I have family close by . . . I maybe haven't stated that I go to church on Sunday, but that would be something important for me, that people may recognize . . .

> that sense of identity . . . that I model the behavior of a Christian person. I feel pretty comfortable, I think, telling almost anyone here that I'm a Christian person and that I attend church, and that I have a spiritual purpose in my life.

Institutional Support

As detailed in the literature review, spirituality and higher education have had a complex and varying relationship throughout history, so participants were asked about the role of spirituality at their current institution. Sherry was positive: "I feel comfortable with being here and with the person that I am, and that I can bring a sense of who I am, being open about things."

Other participants explained how their institution supported spirituality. Amy mentioned:

> What's awesome is to see all the clubs and organizations at the beginning of the semester event—some of them representing lots of belief systems—that students have the option to seek and explore and learn about themselves and its very open in that when it comes to the student affairs area.

Kristine agreed, "So yes, I do generally feel that this is a fairly cosmopolitan institution that values plurality." She noted that there are considerable resources for students "making sure they are supported, making sure there's equity in how we're supporting different people based on their different needs." Scott mentioned his department is "an entity of the institution…to help students succeed." Jada flipped the question:

> We facilitate a lot of the interactions by either working very heavily with off-campus entities or student organizations, and how do we support them? I think we try to help our students figure that piece of it out, but not like the overall umbrella, [which] is what the

> institution is doing, but basically how can we support our students [to] find the options that are out there.

Several participants expressed a conflicted view of institutional support for spirituality. Marilyn's response was conditional, "Yes [spiritual support] for students, but not for staff and faculty." Jada acknowledged it's a complex topic at her institution.

> It's always a very touchy subject, especially with . . . politics, religions, race. Those are always very intimate pieces of people's lives. And I don't think the institution doesn't . . . respect or value the different . . . faith-based aspects of a student. I think it's just very tricky for the institution to highlight all of them equally [by] not saying 'Oh, we celebrate this, or we acknowledge this, but we don't acknowledge the 50 other, you know, spiritual aspects of different students.'

Merinda was aware of the political atmosphere: "I do sense . . . an extra layer of taboo surrounding the practice of Christianity. Unlike other institutions that I've worked in, even public institutions, there's sort of this, I would say, discriminatory tone to the practice of Christianity." Kristine felt her institution had a worldview bias, a

> risk-averse streak running through the messages that I'm getting from institutional leadership, particularly around [standing] up for freedom of expression in certain situations . . . sort of like . . . there are certain things that we have to say to make sure that we don't anger people on this side of the line.

Larry admitted his approach is "not always welcomed by the administration . . . I question things which might be culturally different than the system." As an example, he mentioned the use of ceremonial tobacco as authorized by the Indian Freedom and Religious

Act. He commented, “I don’t think we should think about the naysayers and about not bringing spirituality into the workplace, especially for our students who are looking for something.” Larry brought students to sweat lodges, connected them with medicine men or women, and encouraged them to participate in ceremonies. He was emphatic:

> I don’t think we should worry about the university coming to us and saying ‘well, you shouldn’t be preaching.’ We’re not preaching. We’re making these things accessible and offering a sense that it’s okay to talk about it. We shouldn’t be condemning it or any other religion in any way. Why can’t other religions be talked about or those services be provided, whether it’s formal or informally?

If, and to what degree, participants felt they could express themselves and live out their beliefs in their profession identified the next theme for this study. It also highlighted the complex reasons participants hesitated to bring their spiritual identity to work.

Theme 2: Authenticity at Work is Important

Participants described the complexity of being authentic amongst colleagues, in fulfillment of their position, and within a public institution. Due to the nature of their work, those whose work is social justice-based viewed students through the lens of identities other than spirituality. Being authentic at work was not outwardly sharing beliefs but through living out beliefs in their work. Participants shared they carry out their beliefs on campus through the values of their faith. Treating others are they would want to be treated, respect, care, and hard work was incorporated into their work ethic.

Reasons for lack of transparency were many; not wanting to offend, or prior experiences that these conversations were not welcome. For others, the fear of being judged due to a religious

affiliation was of concern. For those whom another identity was important or for those who did not wish to incorporate their spirituality into their work, these concerns augmented their views. However, those who felt strongly they could not bring their authentic spirituality expressed the greatest dissatisfaction.

One of the hallmarks of student affairs work is interactions with college students. There are many ways this occurs, but one of the most impactful are individual conversations. These mentoring opportunities are discussed next.

Conversations with Students

While spirituality is found in various places on campus, one purpose of this study was to examine what Parks (2000, 2011) identified as being critical to emerging adults: meaningful conversations with mentors. Participants shared their conversations with students regarding spiritualty.

All participants significantly hesitated before identifying a conversation, and two were not able to recall ever having one. Sherry talked with an Atheist student, “I don’t even know if I shared with him that I was a Christian or not, and maybe I didn’t just because I didn’t want to make him feel uncomfortable.” She also discussed a time a student asked about the Christian sticker on her car. She remembered: “He brought up the conversation, and it was comfortable to talk to him because I could identify with it as well.”

Amy shared her approach to conversations with students on spirituality, or what she calls planned happenstance—things happening for a reason. She inquired:

> How did you get here? How did you come to this? There's a plan; a purpose. I'm more of a spiritual person, so those are the things that I ascribe to. That doesn't mean you have to ascribe to that same thing.

Jada connected spirituality and mental health, stating many students defer to a "higher power" to cope with their problems.

Marilyn asked students having a difficult time, "Do you have any spiritual beliefs that would help you get through this?" This enabled conversations with Muslim students, as well as those of other beliefs. She affirmed faith can be a support for some students but was quick to mention she keeps her own faith out of the conversation. Carl took a coaching approach, "What's missing for you as you work to unpack for yourself a sense of spirituality?" Carl spoke of a student, "unpacking some of the experiences that she was having of herself." He created

> A space in which she could talk about what was going on for her. Sometimes the tendency is to fill the space with advice and whatnot, but I think truly, from a mapping out of spirituality in the work of education, sometimes it's just creating a space and allowing that space to exist that is more powerful than anything that could be said.

Jada used questions as well, "Are there other options that can lead you, based on your beliefs and passions?" or, "Is there something within like the African-American community based on religion that you see why this could be happening?" Brian asked students, "Have you thought about . . . ?"

Kristine remarked, "I feel like particularly because of my orientation as a nonbeliever, I'm often having conversations where I'm expressing my worldview, but no one else would look at that conversation and say it was about religion or spirituality." She explained discussions

around family issues and cultural practices in childhood aren't always about religion, but often revolve around obligations. She continued:

> I've had a lot of conversations with students where I'm really fascinated genuinely about people's experiences with religion and the ways that it both constrains and empowers them, and so really trying to draw out those pieces from students as they are trying to figure out, do I believe this?

Kristine expounded:

> So, I would ask a lot of questions that would just force them to explain things and maybe they've never had to explain before, and through that process, people ended up in different places. But I think, I mean, they were always really rewarding conversations for me because I had a genuine interest.

Far from being neutral, spiritual discussions often arise from students who need someone to listen. Merinda shared conversations with students accused of sexual assault have been

> Deep and meaningful. They're doing a lot of soul-searching. They're having trouble reconciling who they are with what they've done. And I think those are the ones that take on a tone of spirituality more than any other.

Marilyn agreed when students are struggling, issues of belief can become significant, "I might go there if I felt like what they were telling me went against what I was picking up from them, against their own belief and their own moral code, regardless of their spirituality beliefs." She noted conversations with international students from shame-based cultures provided opportunities a secular approach to forgiveness to help students heal and move on. Larry commented, "I think a lot of the students who get in trouble are looking for something, they

cannot know that it's spirituality. But that should be available or offered to them." Larry described another way students seek answers and reassurance:

> Not knowing anything about native spirituality, they might come to me with an issue about being accepted for who they are. So, you might have some that come for that reason, looking for that acceptance and being okay for who they are.

Carl added another element "Where there's something to be felt there, that it's not just transactional." Jada remarked:

> And I don't think I've ever spoken to students, necessarily, about my journey with my own spirituality, but I think for students, they've spoken to me. And I tell a little bit about my journey, too, kind of talking from not a religious aspect of it, but just kind of finding my path.

Conversations with students about spirituality presented challenges. Merinda observed:

> I think it needs to come about organically, and it needs to come about in a way that it shows you that's where they are and where they're wanting to go with a conversation. If they don't do some kind of a little opening thing themselves, I don't usually see an opening for me to say anything.

Marilyn agreed, "So it's usually them saying something, though, that gives me an in, that I feel comfortable doing it."

Overall, participants supported a role for spiritual conversations with students. Carl affirmed:

> Absolutely. I personally have not felt restrained or restricted in [having] those kinds of conversations. And I think higher education as a space in general is such a ripe space for

> being able to have those conversations, and I would…assume that more spaces than not would be supportive of having…really meaningful conversations with students.

Missed Conversations

While most participants were able to recall a meaningful spiritual conversation, they also remembered missed opportunities. Merinda admitted, "I was trying to think of times, specific times, where that topic of spirituality has come through loud and clear, and I'm like, man, I haven't done that—a good enough job in getting there with students." Carl mused on missed chances,

> Like way more than I can count. Yeah, so many more than I can count. I think that happens all the time, you know, even when being committed to trying to be present, there's so many things to distract you from that, it's very easy to just have a banal interaction. Somebody drops by and they may be presenting a question that seems very much on the surface, but what they're really searching for is something a little deeper.

Administrative tasks during student meetings limited time for deeper conversations. Sherry admitted:

> I'm sure that I've missed some of those opportunities, I've missed, or intentionally tried to avoid, and I think that's maybe me as a person too. In general, sometimes, trying to see some of those signs or students bringing up certain things and passing over those trying to get a schedule done and knowing that I should maybe take a little more time to reflect, and talk, you know.

She noted another concern, "But, I have worries about not knowing how that conversation would go or worrying about not knowing exactly what to say." Finally, she

acknowledged, “And maybe it’s been in the past, and thinking, maybe I shouldn’t be talking about that, maybe I shouldn’t be having that conversation about spirituality.” Marilyn agreed there are risks:

> But I just think so often it will turn . . . it could turn bad, because I think someone . . . some student might really question why you’re asking that, and then they would take offense, and that could be . . . I think that’s a scary part.

Jada prefaced difficult conversations by saying, “I have no idea what you want to talk to me about, but we can have an open conversation.” Kristine reflected on a missed opportunity:

> And I just—I wish I’d asked him more questions about sort of who he saw himself as and what was he doing in school, why was he there, what was his motivation for being there. But I didn’t go there, and I wish I had.

Insight into when and how conversations with students occur provided the basis for another theme of this study. While ideal to have honest and heartfelt discussions with students, the context of interactions contributes to how often these conversations happen, or if they happen at all.

Theme 3: The Context Matters

Roles, relationships, and opportunities provide the context for if, and how, conversations occur. The location, purpose of the student meeting, imposed restraints such as time and capacity informed conversations. Often these factors created barriers, and as a result, conversations on spirituality were far from common experiences for participants.

Some student affairs positions offer organic opportunities for deep conversations with students. Almost all the participants identified trust, and time to build it as essential to these

interactions. But several participants mentioned that a half-hour advising appointment, conduct meeting, or with multiple tasks to complete, barriers to the active listening, positive regard environment that fosters spiritual conversations existed. The power differential naturally occurring in a conduct meeting, or a student's request for assistance, can impact the perception of a spiritual conversation, and influence whether a student affairs practitioner will engage in that conversation. Carl's new position presents limited opportunities for deeper conversations, whereas previously he often helped students "make sense of or reconcile who they are with maybe a belief system that they were raised with . . . so those meaning-making conversations were in such greater abundance than in this space."

To better understand why conversations with student around spiritual identity are occurring so infrequently, participants were asked to describe their preparation for those discussions. The next section examines the critical aspect of professional development.

Professional Development

Participants agreed there is very little, or certainly not enough, opportunities for professional development around spirituality. Kristine lamented, "I can't think of a whole lot. I wish there was more, or that I was aware of it." Amy mused, "There certainly isn't enough. I mean, I think it's getting . . . I'm hearing more . . . I'm seeing more of it, and maybe it's because I'm more aware." A few participants mentioned college experiences. Marilyn shared:

> I remember having to attend, I think as an undergraduate, a different place of worship that was different from my own that I had to attend as a cultural experience as a class assignment, but as far as professional development…I, I don't really recall much of having those topics come up or having that experience.

Amy created a vision board in a graduate class as one way to manifest desires to the universe or God. Scott admitted, “I don’t think there’s to my knowledge anything in the master’s program specifically on worldview.” Sherry echoed, “it’s not one of the conversations or topics that are brought up often, especially that development piece of figuring out who you are as an undergraduate or graduate student.”

Kristine attended a conference that provided a caucus space for nonbelievers and noted “Anytime I have an opportunity to get in community with other folks who identify this way, I generally jump on it, because it’s not something that’s offered that often.” Merinda attended a conference session on philanthropy and kindness but admitted “That doesn’t really have anything to do with student development, but it stuck out to me as sort of a spiritual . . . it had a spiritual tone.”

Marilyn presented at a conference, comparing religion to tenants in her profession. Merinda attended a retreat for faculty and staff that included “starting with a better understanding of yourself and then bridging towards how you approach . . . how to better approach difference.”

Spirituality-based events on campus were mentioned by some participants. Merinda offered, “I know that there are clubs, because I just walk by their posters and see them, but I honestly don’t know a ton about them.” Kristine added:

> There really is not a lot out there that I’m aware of around the intersection of atheism or agnosticism in higher education. At all the institutions that I’ve been a part of there’s always been a student group of folks, and I just am generally aware of them but haven’t engaged, necessarily. I think it’s hard because we’re . . . we don’t all have this . . . we’re

> a group identified by the fact that we don't share common beliefs. So, what do we organize around other that just, I guess, the experience of feeling othered, right?

Brian paused, "You know . . . um . . . there's only . . . I don't know, maybe you could view this as spirituality." He recalled a Christian speaker, who "challenged students and others to consider what their view of love is and how they best show that. I realized no matter if you are Atheist, or Christian, or Agnostic, whatever, love is defined in different ways through different relationships."

Kristine offered caucus space for nonbelievers and for non-Christian religions at community advisor training:

> But, that . . . it never quite fits, you know? Like those conversations are never about a lack of a faith-based framework, right? They're always about, you know, very important things, Islamophobia, or the ways that religion and race intersect and affect people's experiences, which are great conversations to have, just a completely different conversation from what it is like to not identify or come from a place of faith.

After struggling to identify a spirituality-based professional development experience, Scott realized, "I have to go back and make sure those I supervise have what they need to be successful." Jada reflected that student affairs practitioners, "can't necessarily always learn from a conference or a book, but that's something that you kind of have to of learn along the way."

There was consensus among the participants that both in their graduate program and ongoing professional development there were few, if any, opportunities to understand, explore, and incorporate spiritual identity into their professional work. Without training, most participants felt ill-equipped to have conversations with students around this topic.

Theme 4: Professional Development is Lacking

The difficulty that most, if not all, participants had in naming a graduate or professional training related to spirituality was telling. Across the positions in student affairs and many years of experience, participants had difficulty naming a single learning experience at their institution or through their professional organization related to spirituality. It is no surprise, therefore, that conversations around spiritual topics are not occurring on public campuses and student affairs practitioners feel ill equipped to engage in them. But professional development is only one of several barriers participants mentioned. The next section examines other reasons conversations around spiritual identity are absent from most student affairs work.

Barriers to Conversations

Having established spiritual conversations with students are not common experiences on many public campuses, participants expounded on the contributing barriers. Marilyn pointed out barriers might be imaginary, but they seem real when engaging with students. Real or imagined, participants offered the following hindrances to spiritual conversations with students: trust, differences, intersectionality, roles, public institutions, time, discrimination, student not willing or able, and political climate.

Trust

Jada stated students may be "very comfortable explaining to people 'this is my culture, this is what I'm passionate about', and for other people, it may just be comfortable that they're around somebody that has the same cultural beliefs." Merinda, as a conduct administrator, cited additional trust issues, "There's stuff that really steers me away from those types of conversations, because I would not want to make a student feel uncomfortable and I also don't

want them to feel that anything about the process is unfair." Scott admitted in his work with students, "If the trust isn't there, they won't be forthcoming." Jada noted:

> And I've had some students that have completely bypassed conversations with me, because I was like, okay, that seems very odd why they can't take class at this time. And then I talk to someone else and they say, 'oh, it's because they pray at this time.' And lots of students may not share and you may not be aware of their cultural and religious background. And I think for a lot of students, that could be so tiring, and so they just leave out certain details or they don't tell you certain things.

Differences

Jada mentioned her colleagues are learning to have discussions with students about shamanism and spirits, "And I think in our office we talk very openly about it, whether all of us believe it or not." For Jada, learning served a vital purpose:

> Figuring out how can we best work with students based on the different backgrounds and their different walks of life, how can we best serve the student without judging them or trying to put them in this box that all students are the same.

Jada knew some students may stereotype her, "Whether you want them to or not, people are putting you in boxes." Merinda noted that cultural differences across the United States can contribute to the perception of difference. Kristine acknowledged "I have a really hard time having conversations with those who believe differently from me because this belief is so critical to my identity and the way that I'm sort of finding my identity right now and place in the world."

Intersectionality

> Intersectionality is critical to holistically understanding college students. Jada shared:
>
> So, I think with a lot of our students, they have . . . I guess . . . these intersectional identities. And so that's where a lot of it comes into play. I've probably seen it more so at my institution than anywhere else. We could have a student of color; they're part of the LGBTQ community and they have a different religious belief. We look at our students holistically. We know they're not just students. They have families, they may have kids, and they have different religious and cultural beliefs, or they may have different ethnicities and that may break down in several different ways as well, too. So just not pigeonholing them to that one specific thing that the world may see you as.

Carl agreed:

> There are identities that at various points in time of the day or in different seasons of your life are more salient than others. I know in my work with students who are really unpacking who they are in the world through a lens of sexual orientation or gender identity, unpacking that and working to make sense of that, is very present for them and very salient, and guides and influences almost every aspect of who they are in the world.

Roles

A key barrier for Merinda is her professional responsibilities, which define her relationship to students, often inhibiting spiritual conversations. Kristine, in the same role, cited the bureaucracy of the position and distrust when students perceive the conduct office as adversarial. Marilyn agreed her position discouraged personal sharing, lest students view her as biased. Sherry felt constrained by her role as well:

> Time, location, and maybe just sitting on campus and having those conversations down at the cafeteria may be a little bit different than sitting at a computer by the Advising Center and trying to advise somebody and those things get brought up.

Public Institutions

Participants knew there was a separation of church and state which impacted their work at a public institution. Merinda doesn't "ask questions that are going to specifically yield responses of a spiritual nature because it's not . . . it's not something that is in its nature expected of students at a public school." She continued, "But we do encourage students when they arrive here to explore spirituality. The parents' presentation for new students mentions that it's good for students to explore spirituality through the clubs and organizations at our institution."

Time

Several participants, including Sherry, acknowledged that a major barrier is:

> Taking the time to set aside with that student and talk about something they need to or making a referral if that was needed to further those conversations. I guess when I think back even to my experience as an undergraduate, if somebody would have reached out to me maybe a little bit more and had that conversation with me, how that would go, maybe it would have sparked a little more interest while I was attending college and the same for me, maybe if I were to bring that up to a student who was wavering or was struggling a little bit themselves that could benefit them.

Scott lamented, "I wish I had time, yes, time would be my biggest barrier. I think students would be willing if they had the time, they just don't." Carl offered a more balanced opinion, "I

think time is important. Although that's an excuse as well. So, I think time is a really convenient excuse, and it . . . it's not an illegitimate excuse." Carl cited capacity as an issue, and asked:

> Do you have the wherewithal in that moment to be able to give, serve? And in the spirit of taking care of oneself, it also means not always sacrificing your own time or space or emotional capacity either. Facing challenges and need to preserve yourself a bit.

He elaborated:

> I think as a younger professional, I worked to make myself too available. I was . . . I was maybe not in tune with my own needs for refueling, and I think as a result was distracted in some ways from my own life. And I see that happen occasionally for peers in the profession that allow their career or their commitment to the profession to dominate their lived experience in such a way that it is their . . . like it becomes their life, and it may lack some balance. And I can only recognize that because I've experienced it myself.

Discrimination

For those of a majority identity, an awareness of privilege can inhibit conversations. Marilyn shared:

> Because if I am going to take a route with a student who has a spiritual belief that's informing their own decisions and I use that to kind of help them get to a point where they can forgive themselves or forgive someone else, I'm afraid they are going to take that and think I'm discriminating against them because they are not of the same faith.

Students Not Willing

Many participants mentioned a student may not want to discuss spirituality, "Actually, I've never held back because I'm like 'I bet this student is not a spiritual person,'" Amy shared,

but she described “a vibe I get. I don’t feel I can go there.” Kristine mentioned encounters with students who do not want to consider other views:

> And they’re just coming in with this idea of, okay, either I’m sort of open to questioning, or I’ve already decided that this is how I feel and I have all of these people out in the mainstream culture that are confirming my beliefs and encouraging me not to question them, encouraging me not to engage in conversations with people who are different. Those set in their beliefs are not willing to put it down for a second to try and pick up another idea or way of looking at it.

Political Climate

Kristine acknowledged current political and societal tensions:

> I think students and all of us are set up right now specifically to have sort of a knee-jerk reaction to anything that borders on political or, you know, sort of religious things that might influence the way that someone looks at the world. Right? We are set up to be on one side or the other and be staunch in that identity. And I do feel like I’ve seen that change the conversations that I’m having with students over the past several years, that people are not necessarily as willing to have conversations that go deeper, they don’t think this is the right setting for it.

While these barriers are not exhaustive reasons that spiritual conversations do not occur between students and student affairs practitioners, they further complicate a complex set of expectations, perceptions, and differences. These considerations make it more difficult for practitioners to serve as the mentors that Parks (1986, 2000, 2111) cited as critical for students searching for meaning and purpose during emerging adulthood.

Theme 5: Barriers Exist

Adding to the complexities mentioned previously, barriers create challenges for conversations with students. Time, capacity, willingness of a student to discuss spirituality, and lack of confidence in how to engage in conversations are challenges that inhibit even the most holistic of student affairs practitioners. These barriers were evident in their own collegiate and graduate school, which lacked intentional coursework and experiences around spirituality, and continued in their professional lives as they perceived spiritual conversations were controversial and inconsequential to student affairs.

In general, student affairs practitioners who participated in this study were able to identify both challenges and strategies that influenced their conversations with students. A closer look at both is needed.

Challenges and Strategies

As conversations with students around spiritual topics are not a common experience in the daily work of student affairs practitioners, participants elaborated on factors they perceived as challenges to those conversations. In contrast, they suggested strategies to incorporate spiritual conversations into their work.

Different Belief System

One consideration around spirituality is students may identify with a religion, spiritual practice, or a secular perspective different from that of the practitioner. Kristine was direct, "Yeah, I mean, certainly I'll recognize that it's probably more awkward. Right. It's just a more awkward conversation." She elaborated:

> I wonder if it's more difficult because my spiritual whatever identity is characterized by a lack of dogma, a lack of a structured, easily-identifiable-by-others belief system. Right? Like it's a hodgepodge of things, and I can talk about where that piece comes from, but it's not as though I can use a whole lot of shorthand in communicating to others about what my belief system is.

Merinda granted, "Sometimes it can be helpful to know what frames the conversation. It would be helpful to understand kind of their . . . where they're operating from. There's a lot of times I probably don't know where they're operating from though." Jada agreed:

> I think that definitely plays a part. I seek out African-American like culture, just based on religious beliefs, or something very simple that way. And also, you feel closer to your own, I guess, cultural background when you do have so many students that are different.

Sherry admitted:

> I can say that I understand, I get that, or I go to church. With a student who has different beliefs, I didn't want to say something wrong or offend them or make a student feel like they shouldn't be comfortable coming to talk to me.

Others disagreed religious differences influence student conversations. Amy looked for transcending themes, "Honestly, I should probably say yes, but I don't think it does, because I think . . . it's not like I'm imposing on them, but I'll say, what's the pattern you're seeing? Overall, there's something bigger than us, right?" Merinda admitted while it was helpful to understand the worldview of a student, that didn't totally influence her conversations, "I have appreciation for a lot of different religious practices."

Equating Spirituality with Religion

Carl struggled with the word spirituality, "because of how I experience the word spirituality as being about religion in some way . . . many religious practices have some sort of judgement or persecution built into their framework, that it's difficult to separate some of that." He elaborated:

> And I know that until I got to a place where I felt just at home on my own sense of what that means for me, that given my . . . who I am in the world, there was a time and point where a conversation around spirituality would just automatically have me on the defensive. And specifically, when others I perceived to be trying to convince me that their experience of or their subscription to that particular set of beliefs is the right one, that was not helpful in getting me to think for myself about my own sense of spirituality.

Willingness to Learn

The openness and vulnerability from a practitioner who is comfortable not having answers or knowing everything can be a strength in spiritual conversations. Carl reflected:

> Maybe as a younger professional, out of fear of showing up incompetent or not worthy of being in the space of education and playing a role, it may have been a bit more intimidating to be in a conversation with somebody about something that I didn't know anything about. But I think as I've . . . as I've found more peace within who I am and how . . . you know, and who I held myself out to be for myself and others, it frees up for me the ability to learn and to be curious.

Sherry was actively learning about religions and spirituality. Kristine touted Ted Talks, YouTube videos, podcasts and articles as learning opportunities, "because it's more difficult to

have a conversation out of nowhere than a conversation that's grounded in a shared reference point of some sort." Scott challenged a supervisee to "take the topic and expand it into a broader discussion. Some will say they don't know who God is and that's a way to learn from each other." The supervisee is currently reading about spirituality as preparation for future conversations.

Openness

Carl shared:

> My experience has been that when you show interest in somebody else's ideas or thinking or beliefs, that often, people really are excited to talk about that a little bit more. And there's almost a freedom that comes with the not knowing, because you get to kind of be in the conversation in such a way that may give you the courage to ask questions that otherwise may appear as though . . . as judgmental or juvenile or inappropriate.

Scott agreed:

> If it's me, I'll just ask the question and we'll just see where it ends up. Being able to ask those questions in an open environment is important. It's so much fun, but you have to be comfortable and willing to screw up. You have to get past it, because it's going to happen.

He noted:

> It takes practice in how to stay open. I think that potentially what could be in discord with being able to facilitate these conversations with students or with oneself or whatnot is when we've kind of shut out other possibilities.

Carl added:

> But I think in order to have really powerful, really meaningful conversations which allow another to sit with, to unpack, to find their way through what works for them, really does require openness, unconditional positive regard, free of judgment, no fear of persecution.

Active Listening

Active listening was mentioned as elemental in fostering deep conversations. Sherry mused on a conversation with an atheist student:

> Maybe I don't need all the right things to say and how to have that conversation, maybe it's truly just figuring out how to listen to a student who just needs to have that conversation and how do I hear them out.

Merinda agreed practitioners need:

> A willingness to listen and reflect what you're hearing. I know that can be beneficial for me in situations where I have big questions and I'm kind of working my way towards my own answers. I think that willingness to recognize that you're not in a position to instill knowledge as much as you are to be a sounding board for the person.

Being Comfortable in Own Beliefs

Carl stated being aware of his own beliefs is:

> Like being comfortable, being at home, yet staying open to the possibility of other possibilities. Not being closed off to this is the only way to think about this…or this isn't, and I think one could be really at home and . . . with who they are and their sense of spirituality and open, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are . . . that they don't have principle or that they don't have a grounding.

Kristine agreed:

> I think reflecting on my own, so making sure that I am practicing like self-care of the mind and spirit, you know? That I'm reading things that are interesting and inspiring to me so that when I do talk to the student I'm not just on autopilot, you know.

Questions

Several participants noted that asking questions can encourage conversations. Kristine observed, "My spiritual identity, or nonbeliever, that has all come about as a result of a lot of questioning, and so I enjoy engaging in that with students." She continued:

> I'm always trying to dig underneath the surface of this is what I believe, or this is what I identify as, to sort of get to the why beneath it, and looking for any hidden assumptions that are embedded in that worldview for students. I think it has made me able to have conversations with others who sort of are exploring their spirituality or questioning their own religion, like that's a really kind of easy conversation for me to engage in.

She elaborated:

> What kinds of questions can I ask this person that will help me reveal their belief system and where maybe some contradictions may be or whether their actions and behaviors are actually running counter to what they profess to believe or what kinds of values they want to embody.

The strategies to overcome barriers to conversations around spiritual identity center around the confidence and approach of student affairs practitioners to their own beliefs. In knowing themselves, they are better able to be mentors for students.

Theme 6: Knowing Themselves

Some participants defined meaning and purpose as self-understanding and inner-exploration. Having worked through issues for themselves informed if, and how, they approached spiritual conversations with students. Carl reflected:

> I think to be effective in leading or dialoguing in conversation about spirituality, one has to have had put some time and energy and thinking into their own core beliefs. They have to in some ways feel at home in their own sense of spirituality. And I think it's an evolutionary process. I don't know if it's ever that place where one could say that they've completely arrived at.

He shared this analogy:

> How you see the world is just one prescription, and as your life continues to evolve and as you experience new and different or challenging experiences, that prescription can be altered slightly, and occasionally, you'll have a major shift in your sight.

Summary of Themes

While participants shared details about their work and meaningful conversations with students, several themes transcended individual participants and created a common thread woven across their experiences. These themes provide a broader perspective on the spirituality of student affairs practitioners.

The study results regarding participants' spiritual backgrounds, how they bring their authentic self to work, and factors that influence their conversations with students regarding spirituality. As the interview concluded, Sherry reflected:

> It definitely makes me think a little bit more about how I will have these conversations in the future and am I bringing my authentic self to work and the conversations I have with students and do they feel comfortable sharing what they need to share and bringing those things up to me? It makes me want to be a little more intentional in how I have those conversations or in how I interact with students. I guess I just, I want to be intentional and I hope that I do that within each interaction that I have with each student who walks in the door; maybe I can think about that a little bit more when I have those interactions and conversations that come up that I can still feel comfortable with who I am and what I believe in and can help others to feel the same with whatever their beliefs are when we have a conversation.

Based on the six themes of values represent spirituality, authenticity at work is important, the context matters, professional development is lacking, barriers exist and knowing themselves, the research questions for this study can be answered. These answers comprise the next section of this chapter.

Research Questions

The first research question sought to discover how student affairs practitioners integrate spirituality into their work. Participants resoundingly affirmed they daily use their personal values and beliefs. Through working hard, treating others with respect, and practicing mindfulness, participants clearly aligned their beliefs with their work. But this connection had limitations in that participants were uncertain if they could live out their authentic self with some colleagues and at their institution. This correlates with Kiessling's (2010) study of student affairs practitioners, in which most respondents described themselves as spiritual but speculated less

than 15% of their colleagues were. It is not surprising then, that only 11% of those studied reporting having spiritual conversations with others at their institution.

The second research question, which asked to what extent participants could bring their authentic self to work, illustrated this point, in that several were adamant they could not be authentic at their institution. Others choose not to do so. Most cited a concern their beliefs would be perceived negatively. For a few, spiritual identity was not a significant identity for them, and thus chose not to incorporate their beliefs into their professional life.

The third research question sought to identify factors that influenced when and how student affairs practitioners had spiritual conversations with students. Most participants reported they were not having these conversations at all; the remainder were only able to recall a few such conversations. The reasons participants shared were complex, but included institutional factors, personal constraints, and concerns around student perceptions. A detailed discussion of this topic was presented in Chapter IV.

Three overarching conclusions were gleaned from the research questions and underscore the complexity of the role of spirituality in public higher education. First, there is a lack of knowledge in higher education in general and within student affairs specifically around spiritual issues. Also, spirituality has yet to be understood and accepted as a core identity of college students. Finally, the supportive and inclusive environment that student affairs strives to create for students often excludes spiritual identity for its practitioners and students both.

Chapter Summary

Of all that was shared by participants, the story that impacted me most was Marilyn's. She received a national award from a religious higher education organization. Traditionally,

distinctions such as these are prized and acknowledged, but she shared, "that's the one I will not put up because I'm so afraid of it and getting…I think I'm more afraid of the ostracism that comes along with being a Christian on this campus, especially in student affairs." Amy expressed her hope that things could be different in the future:

> I wish that we would focus more as an institution or as a society on what brings us together versus what divides us. Why do we focus so much on how different we are? If we focused on how much we have in common, and if there's ways that we in student affairs can link the commonalities together more in our work, it's the same thing as, you know, we all touch on things with students, whether we work in the counseling center or whether we work on the career piece, or whether we work in as an adviser or whether we work in conduct, we all meet different pieces of students and we all touch on different pieces. Whatever department we belong to, there's this commonality, and that's why we belong together and that's why we work together.

Merinda mused, "And maybe it's the most important thing. Isn't that interesting? Thinking about your purpose in life. Isn't that what's really going to motivate any student more than anything?" Brian concurred:

> That spirituality piece is, from my worldview, what we need here, we need people who are going to understand that ability to empower people, to make them feel like they are important, that they can be successful, be there to help guide them and not just say it's that person in the advising office's job to do that; understand that this is a team effort. That every interaction we have with each other; with a team member, community

member and with a student especially, is so important to the success of this college. I take that to heart.

Participants expressed hope that student affairs practitioners will advance the holistic development of students, including spiritual development, as a tenet of the profession. That day may come, but it is not today for those seeking to bring their authentic self to their workplace and their conversations with students.

Chapter V incorporates the data and themes from Chapter IV with recommendations for practitioners, institutions, and the profession of student affairs. It discusses the research questions, limitations of the study, implications for future research, theory, and practice. Final thoughts are offered to conclude the study.

Chapter V: Discussion

This qualitative study explored how spiritual identity influences student affairs practitioners' work, including their conversations with students. Whereas, a major tenant of the student affairs profession is the development of the whole student (ACE, 1937, 1949), examining how students' spiritual identity is impacted by student affairs practitioners and the factors which influence how practitioners display their authentic self at work was worthy of further study. Fowler (1981) and Parks (1986, 2011) provided a theoretical lens to ground the study. The literature on religion in American higher education, the student affairs profession, and demographics of the college student informed this research. Ten student affairs practitioners from public institutions in a Midwestern state served as participants. Through semi-structured interviews, data was obtained toward the following research questions:

1. How do student affairs practitioners integrate spirituality into their work?
2. To what extent do student affairs practitioners bring their authentic self to work?
3. What factors influence student affairs practitioners' conversations with students regarding spirituality?

The spiritual journey of participants and how their beliefs are lived out at a public institution focused the data. If, and when, they engaged in spiritual conversations with students was of special interest. The previous chapter analyzed the data garnered from the study participants, which led to identifying the following themes: authenticity at work is important, the context matters, professional development, values represent spirituality, knowing themselves, and barriers exist.

This chapter concludes the study with a discussion of the findings considering the research questions, themes, and literature review to offer overarching conclusions. The limitations of the study will be discussed, recommendations for future research and implications for practice will be suggested. Final remarks will conclude the study.

Discussion

As discussed extensively in Chapter II, many students place value on their spiritual identity and have an expectation their college experience will contribute to its development (Astin et al., 2011). Adding complexity are the growing number of college students who profess non-traditional spiritual and secular beliefs (Gallup Inc., 2016). With these expectations in mind, public colleges and universities, including student affairs practitioners, are challenged to integrate this vital identity into their work. Some challenges arise from individual circumstances, while others result from the professional role. The institutional and political context adds another layer of consideration. The study findings in light of relevant research, along with researcher observations are worthy of further discussion.

The first research question sought to discover how student affairs practitioners integrate spirituality into their work. Participants resoundingly affirmed they daily use their personal values and beliefs. Through working hard, treating others with respect, and practicing mindfulness, participants clearly aligned their beliefs with their work. But this connection had limitations in that participants were uncertain if they could live out their authentic self with some colleagues and at their institution. This correlates with Kiessling's (2010) study of student affairs practitioners, in which most respondents described themselves as spiritual but speculated less

than 15% of their colleagues were. It is not surprising then, that only 11% of those studied reporting having spiritual conversations with others at their institution.

The second research question, which asked to what extent participants could bring their authentic self to work, illustrated this point, in that several were adamant they could not be authentic at their institution. Others choose not to do so. Most cited a concern their beliefs would be perceived negatively. For a few, spiritual identity was not a significant identity for them, and thus chose not to incorporate their beliefs into their professional life.

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Three overarching conclusions were gleaned from the research questions and underscore the complexity of the role of spirituality in public higher education. First, there is a lack of knowledge in higher education in general and within student affairs specifically around spiritual issues. Also, spirituality has yet to be understood and accepted as a core identity of college students. Finally, the supportive and inclusive environment that student affairs strives to create for students often excludes spiritual identity for its practitioners and students both.

Student affairs practitioners are aware in their graduate school preparation that spirituality is not an essential component to their professional work. Speck (2005) noted most graduate programs did not address spirituality; although a few included the importance of values.

Rogers and Love (2007a) likewise reported that while graduate faculty agreed with the concept that meaning and purpose were important, they did not offer coursework around spirituality in their programs. It is not surprising therefore; my study's participants could not recall any graduate coursework centered on spirituality. Once a student affairs practitioner, spirituality was again noticeably absent. Participants struggled to identify any professional development opportunity at either their institution or within their professional organization related to spirituality. Several were not able to offer even one example. Many student affairs practitioners, including the participants in this study, have not been provided the basic knowledge and skills to incorporate spirituality into their work. Seifert (2015) found few student affairs practitioners intentionally incorporate spirituality into their work, which this study confirmed. It also reinforced that until student affairs practitioners are equipped and supported in spiritual identity work, it will remain on the fringes of the profession. Students expect student affairs practitioners to engage around spiritual identity development (Astin et al., 2011), but practitioners are ill-prepared to do so, thus not delivering on the promise to provide holistic support.

In addition to a lack of knowledge, a climate in which spirituality is often limited to religious, secular or spiritual student organizations, provides minimal visibility on campus for spiritual conversations and student reflection. While the student affairs profession has championed other identities, spirituality has yet to be embraced as a core way of viewing who students are, confirming the findings of Small (2015) and Dalton and Crosby (2012). While the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2016) incorporated spiritual knowledge, awareness, and skills into domains for professional competency and both professional student affairs organizations, NASPA and ACPA (2015) have espoused spiritual

development as a tenant of the profession, a disconnect exists between these standards and the lived experience of practitioners.

Participants in this study whose personal experience or professional responsibilities centered on identities of gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation specifically mentioned they viewed students through these lenses as well and spirituality was often a secondary or non-existent perspective. Additionally, many student affairs practitioners primarily encounter students through the responsibilities of their specific position. With capacity and time limitations, student conversations are often limited to transactional interactions and brief check-ins around class schedules, roommate conflicts, or career goals.

Lastly, the supportive and inclusive environment that student affairs seeks to provide for its students may not be available for those who seek to incorporate spirituality into their professional work. Speck (2005) noted student affairs practitioners are uncomfortable discussing personal topics and perceived a lack of supervisor support, so limit expressions of spiritual identity at work. This study found mixed support for this assertion. While some participants felt their colleagues and supervisors would likely be supportive, most had not broached the subject. A minority of my participants shared specific examples of colleagues making disparaging remarks about spiritual identity, cooling the climate for future conversations.

There was general agreement that at an institutional level, there was less support, and at times, overt distancing from religious topics. Based on personal experience, most participants perceived the institution as being biased towards specific groups or viewpoints, which had the effect of silencing those with alternative views. Lindholm (2014), Nash and Murray (2010), and

Shahjahan (2010) noted proselytizing, first amendment issues, fear of isolation, and being labeled, or judged as reasons it is difficult to find a place for spirituality in student affairs work.

Seifert (2015) found few student affairs practitioners intentionally incorporate spirituality into their work, mirroring what participants in this study shared. This contradicts Kiessling (2010), where 55% of student affairs practitioners said to "integrate spirituality into my life" was very or extremely important. Craft and Hochella (2010) discovered few student affairs practitioners could identify a purpose for their life. These studies highlight the conflict many student affairs practitioners experience; for some, they have yet to do the work of identifying and integrating spirituality into their own lives. Others struggle to identify how to live out their authenticity in their work, and still others long to be more spiritual at work, but past negative experiences have left them hesitant to do so. And finally, some student affairs practitioners are focused on other identities, which leaves little space and time to incorporate spirituality into their lives or work.

Added together, these positions leave little room for authentic spiritual expression in public higher education. When a person brings their authentic self to any situation, including work, they align their core values, beliefs, and identity. The reverse can also be true; when individuals perceive they must conceal their true self, they are unlikely to offer students a path towards knowing and being themselves and to engage with students to provide that opportunity.

Of course, it follows student affairs practitioners must reflect on their own spiritual development before being able to meaningfully share it with students, as several authors have asserted (Baxter Magolda, 2009, Love & Talbot, 1999). In this study those who cited spirituality as being very important to them personally, also identified more ways in which they integrate

their beliefs into their work and felt more comfortable doing do. Those whose journey led them from a formalized religion in childhood to adult beliefs that are more closely aligned with spirituality, used generalized values to express their authentic self at work. And naturally, those who stated that spirituality was not a core identity in their lives were least likely to share their belief system with students.

Parks (2011) extensively discussed the importance of a caring community as emerging adults explore life's big questions. When student affairs practitioners feel supported; where their own fears, beliefs, and values are welcomed, they are more likely to create an inclusive space for students. Providing a safe mentoring environment for both practitioners and students is essential for addressing the issues of emerging adult development (Parks, 2011). Listening, encouraging reflection, and role modeling authenticity are critical in creating the environment in which this occurs (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Parks, 2011). Participants in this study indicated that they, for the most past, were yet to experience the support and inclusivity that Parks envisioned. Given this, it was not surprising that student affairs practitioners were not creating this nurturing environment for students either.

To summarize, research around spirituality has been increasing and is leading the way to better understanding and valuing the diversity of worldviews on our college campuses. Students are coming to campus with an expectation and a deep need to find meaning and purpose during young adulthood. However, student affairs, while espousing spiritual development as a tenant of the profession, has a long way to go to adequately train graduate students as well as continue to offer professional development opportunities around spirituality to its practitioners.

This disconnect has led to a lack of visibility around spiritual identity, even as other social justice issues are championed by the profession. Furthermore, those practitioners who desire to bring their authentic self to their work, discover barriers that limit or prevent spirituality being a part of their work, including their work with students. It's time for the student affair profession to give needed attention to equipping practitioners to holistically support all the identities, including spirituality, that students bring to our campuses.

Limitations

While this study highlighted issues and challenges of student affairs practitioners around spirituality, its scope was restricted, so several limitations deserve consideration as they may have impacted the findings.

1. The study was not intended to be representative of all student affairs practitioners nor address the comprehensive factors related to spirituality in student affairs at public institutions. Rather, the purpose was to explore deeper understandings of the factors that may influence whether student affairs practitioners bring their authentic self to work, including their conversations with students. This type of research, based on individual experience, "leads to expectations rather than formal predictions" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 296). Therefore, the generalizability of the study may be limited.
2. Most participants identified with a Christian background. Although representative of religious demographics in the Midwest and United States (Pew Research Center, 2016), it does not account for the growing population who follow a minority worldview, including those who are Atheist or Agnostic (Gallup Inc., 2016). Despite

the researcher's efforts to identify and invite participation from those who profess a minority belief system, their perspectives are not extensively heard in this study.

3. Because practitioners vary in comfortability disclosing their spiritual beliefs and behaviors, they may have altered responses or provided answers they deemed socially acceptable. A few participants openly acknowledged spirituality was difficult to discuss and were apprehensive to respond to some interview questions, even after being assured of the confidentiality measures for the study.
4. When participants were asked for their personal definition of spirituality, they often replied with detailed examples of experiences and values, making a shared definition difficult to determine. Thus, this study does not offer a definitive definition of spirituality.
5. Due to the nature of qualitative research and the subjective data it creates, the researcher may have misunderstood the nuanced meanings of participant responses. As an example, the term spirituality, may have been interpreted differently between a participant and the researcher.
6. Since the study was conducted in one Midwestern state, regional or cultural differences may limit the transferability of experiences to student affairs practitioners in other areas of the country. Jada and Brian spoke to the specific regional differences they experienced, thus adding validity to these differences.
7. The study was originally designed to focus on conversations between student affairs practitioners and students, but interviews provided the richest data on how participants' worldviews influenced their work. Many participants found it difficult to

identify a specific spiritual conversation with a student, limiting the data for this research question. Based on this, the researcher chose to use student conversations as one example of how student affairs practitioners lived out their authentic self at work, rather than the primary focus of the study.

8. The study was limited to student affairs practitioners in public higher education institutions, and as such may not reflect the campus climate and mission of private and proprietary institutions. In addition, the perspectives, nature of relationships with students, and position expectations may differ in other types of institutions.

The limitations of this study provide direction for additional research into the topic of student affairs practitioners and spirituality. Exploration into practitioners' conversations with students adds another dimension to be further studied.

Implications for Future Research

While the number of research studies related to spirituality in higher education has increased over the past few decades (Small, 2015), and this study attempts to fill a gap in existing literature, there remains ample opportunity for further research, as outlined below.

Research from a quantitative perspective, using alternative methodologies, would permit a more representative sample of student affairs practitioners to be studied, providing a more robust understanding the ways practitioners bring their authentic self to their position and how authenticity impacts their work with students. A longitudinal study would garner additional insight into spiritual development over time and strengthen understanding of both Fowler and Park's theories.

A comprehensive study could identify a more widely accepted definition of spirituality, one more broadly inclusive of all worldviews. Given the significant difference in culture and missions, an examination of student affairs practitioners' authenticity at public and private institutions would be of interest. Research on student spirituality, by Astin et al., (2011) and Lindholm (2014), examined faculty spirituality, which added to the understanding of these topics, but a comprehensive examination of student affairs practitioners has yet to be conducted.

Previous studies have asserted that students develop in their spiritual identity during the college years (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Parks, 2000, 2011). The next step in advancing this work is to examine student expectations of student affairs practitioners in that process (Robinson & Glanzer, 2016).

How spirituality intersects with other college student identities is emerging as a research topic, but there is much more to learn about this critical juncture. Seifert (2015) offered direction for future research into student meaning-making, as students "articulate and own their sense of meaning and purpose, particularly as individuals' religious, spiritual, and /or worldview identities intersect with other axes of identity" (pp. 58-9). Small (2011) called for research on the intersection between spirituality, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. In this study, Kristine, Carl, and Brian mentioned ways intersectionality of identities added complexity to the understanding of themselves and their worldview.

Scant research has been undertaken how students who practice minority religions experience spiritual development, practice their faith in a Christianized environment, and how to provide a more inclusive environment for them. Understanding the experience of those with minority worldviews has only recently been examined (Goodman, Wilson, & Nicholazzo, 2015;

Small, 2011). She identified four college student worldviews but admitted there are more perspectives yet to study. Means and Jaeger (2016) noted a lack of research on Jewish, Muslim, and other non-Christian students. Research on Hindu and Buddhist students' spiritual development has not been extensively studied (Siner, 2015). Love (2002) contended an examination of the relationship between spiritual development and culture is needed, given the increasing globalization of American universities. This study confirmed a difference in how practitioners with a minority spiritual view experience life on campus. Larry and Kristine mentioned feeling disconnected because of their beliefs and acknowledged colleagues did not understand their perspective.

Means and Jaeger (2016) noted a need for research on the role of spirituality in student persistence, including ways student affairs professionals could address spiritual identity as a retention factor. Sense of belonging has recently been identified as important in retention (Strayhorn, 2012). For example, loneliness and isolation result from a lack of belonging, a key benefit to connecting to others with a similar spiritual identity (Astin et al., 2011). Studies which examine spiritual identity as a retention factor would assist student affairs practitioners to create belonging environments for all students. Astin et al. (2011), found participants who perceived they belonged increased their commitment to the institution and to higher education.

Finally, additional research is needed on the role student affairs practitioners have in students' spiritual development examining the role of practitioners with students of various spiritual beliefs. Jada mentioned conversations with her colleagues were a significant way she learned more about Muslim and Hmong beliefs, to better relate to students who professed those identities.

Implications for Theory

This study used a conceptual framework to understand emerging adults' spiritual development and the role of student affairs practitioners in supporting that development. Theorists have also provided insight into student affairs practitioners seeking to be authentic in their work. The study was grounded in the spiritual development theories of Fowler (1981) and Parks (1986, 2000, 2011). Fowler noted the importance of having beliefs supported by others. This is especially critical when individuals begin to understand and define their beliefs during emerging adulthood (Baxter Magolda, 2009, Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2011). This transition was mentioned by many participants in this study, who identified the late teen years as a definitive time of questioning childhood beliefs and forging new ways of defining their worldview.

Fowler's (1981) theory was developed almost exclusively with white, Christian participants, only 3.6% subjects identified as non-Christian (Evans et al., 2010, Patton et al., 2016). Research with students who profess a minority religious view would increase the generalizability of his theory. Small (2011, 2015) noted significant differences in the spiritual experiences and development of students who identify with a majority religion compared with students who profess a minority religion.

There has been a broader application of Park's theory in practice than research (Craft & Hochella, 2010; Patton et al., 2016). Given research is limited, direction for exploration into her theories include examining the intersection between cognitive and spiritual development (Love, 2002). Park's adult faith stage was confirmed by several participants in the study, who expressed being comfortable with the ambiguity mature life brings, while being open to those who profess a different truth. These participants answered the big questions of life, while still

accepting others answered those questions in another way. Participants expressed the need for community, which Park's theory was the first to clearly articulate for emerging adults.

Participants expressed growing from their childhood faith towards the intersectionality of their multiple identities. Winkle-Wagner & Locks (2014) noted newer theories take intersectionality into account. Given multiple identities student affairs practitioners in this study identified with, intersectionality is important to continue conceptualizing.

Implications for Practice

This study offers an initial exploration of how student affairs practitioners are living out their authentic self while providing holistic development for students. Reflecting on the intersection of spirituality and higher education, several recommendations for student affairs practitioners are worthy of mention.

There is a role for public institutions in spiritual development of emerging adults. While institutions have often taken a hands-off approach, a campus culture that values spirituality creates an environment where seeking for both employees and students is welcomed. Institutions that provide programs, spaces, and inclusive policies demonstrate support for holistic student development is possible. Further programs, practices, and trainings, including those that clarify the role of public institutions around spirituality are needed to create this culture.

Student affairs has much to offer in advancing spiritual identity initiatives. For student affairs practitioners, professional development opportunities on authenticity at work and understanding spiritual development of students are important first steps. Another measure would be to provide training on spirituality, including various worldviews, for employees and students. Role playing focusing on spiritual conversations with students, offering programs that

encourage self-reflection, and valuing co-curricular initiatives rooted in holistic development, including spiritual development, would communicate acceptance to both staff and students.

Student affairs practitioners have a vital role in advancing holistic student development at a public institution. Since most graduate preparation programs do not include spirituality, practitioners need to find other opportunities to reflect on their spiritual journey as a precursor to mentoring students in life purpose. Goodman (2013) encouraged student affairs practitioners to develop self-awareness of their own spiritual development. Love (2002) suggested student affairs professionals need to contemplate "how they create meaning, purpose and direction in their lives" (p. 370). Liddell et al., (2016) suggested student affairs professionals "integrate our identity and our integrity into our practice. Doing so requires deep knowledge of ourselves and others, and the kind of personal reflection that can lead to transformation" (p. 57).

Practitioners may consider how their beliefs influenced their ability to provide support to and honor students of all faith traditions. Nash and Murray (2010) argued that student affairs practitioners' competence to help students make meaning is directly related to their ability to tell their personal stories of meaning-making. They explained our stories "provide deep insight into what we value and what we do not; into who we are striving to become both personally and professionally, and who we are not" (p. 117).

Student affairs practitioners can intentionally explore ways to share their story in a non-judgmental or proselytizing manner. As an example, learning to ask good questions to help students explore the answers to their big questions in life encourages students to think about their spirituality and demonstrate the supportive 'other' important for self-exploration.

According to Schwartz, (2007) the academy is an environment in which "multiple mentoring communities serve the process of moving from adolescence into a significant adulthood" (p.6). These are spaces where students feel both supported and challenged as they learn how to embrace their future and dreams. "By intention or default, every college and university is a mentoring environment" (Parks, 2008, p.6). Love (2001, 2002) also suggested intentionally creating mentoring communities. Beyond supporting students, student affairs practitioners can encourage colleagues to be authentic by creating a space for affirming conversations.

Inclusive language around belief systems is essential. Language can marginalize students of certain belief systems; as Small (2015) asserted, the term spirituality can exclude those who identify as nonbelievers. Colleges and universities must "nurture the possibilities of the expression of spiritual identities, especially for racially minoritized students (Rogers & Love, 2007a, 2007b). This involves educating student affairs practitioners about Atheist students and providing safe spaces and honest conversations to help them be more visible on campus. Liddell and Stedman (2011) pointed out, "By supporting a group that gives nonreligious nontheists a space to ask questions of meaning, purpose, and value, administrations give a clear signal that they are dedicated to fostering a campus ethos that encourages character development for all students" (p. 5). Colleges and universities should identify specific faculty and staff who can serve as resources and allies for Atheist students (Liddell & Stedman, 2011) Liddell and Stedman (2011) suggested the terms worldview and identity rather than spirituality, faith, or religion. Kristine spoke to the ways terminology impacted her voice in conversations about belief systems.

Student affairs practitioners need not position themselves as spiritual experts; however, lack of basic knowledge on various worldviews was cited by participants as a reason they did not engage students in spiritual conversations. Participants stated not being afraid to not to know everything, having a learner mentality, and showing a genuine interest in students compensated for lack of specific knowledge on worldviews. But, religio-spiritual competence needs to be in every student affairs practitioner's toolbox (Nash & Murray, 2010).

Student affairs practitioners must acquire competencies in how culture and belief systems intertwine. Cabrera (2015) found specific training for student affairs practitioners helped them to work with students. Dunn et al., (2015) observed student affairs practitioners must "understand and respect faith as an integral part of identity, while also understanding that faith may come in conflict with other aspects of identity" (p. 383). Practitioners should have a deeper appreciation for the potential role that spirituality could have in their conversations with students and in their work (Nash & Murray, 2010).

Final Thoughts

I believe that the mission of higher education is to provide emerging adults the skills, experiences, and tools they need to understand themselves and fulfill their purpose in life. Student affairs practitioners play a vital role in accomplishing this mission. Developing a life of purpose and our authentic self through reflecting on our own spiritual journey is the first step to engaging and mentoring students in their lives. As educators, we have the privilege and responsibility to create a caring community in which students can explore, question, and thrive during the critical years of emerging adulthood. Student affairs practitioners serve as guardians

of that community; they provide students with feedback, listen to their questions, and encourage self-discovery.

This study sought to answer three research questions while providing initial insights and a baseline understanding to launch further research and best practices related to authenticity at work and students' spiritual conversations on public campuses. This work is critical in that spirituality is a core identity for many who work and study at public institutions across the United States (Astin et al., 2011; Lindholm, 2014), but the student affairs profession has yet to fully embrace the potential and the necessity of engaging in this work.

Throughout the journey of this study, several questions have been foremost in my thinking. I hoped by the completion of the study they all would be answered. But the researchers and authors who have come before me, the participants who so kindly shared their experiences, and the new questions that arose as the study progressed all leave me with more to ponder. How do we engage student affairs practitioners and students from all faith backgrounds in a way they feel supported? How do we live out our own experience, while honoring and respecting that of others? And overarching these questions is this: how do we value spiritual identity in public education?

As I explored the literature, and contemplated the stories of my participants, I asked myself how I was living out my authentic self at work and how intentionally I was incorporating discussion of 'big questions' into my work. The answer was, not very well. The hesitations, concerns, and barriers my participants expressed mirror my own. But this study has encouraged me to continue exploring, asking, and seeking to serve students better through being willing to have conversations with them about their spiritual identity.

Parks (2007) emphatically stated:

> Not only the quality of their individual lives but also our future as a culture depends in no small measure on our capacity to recognize emerging adults, to initiate them into the big questions of their lives and our times, and to give them access to worthy dreams. (Parks, 2011, p. xi)

Has it been too long the student affairs profession has failed to embrace spirituality as an identity and to ask:

> How do I order my own life within the college and university setting in a way that creates the optimum possibilities for the becoming of the students that are entrusted to us for a brief, but a very powerful and significant time during the formation of their adult life? (Schwartz, 2007, p.7)

The answer is simple, as educators, student affairs practitioners must be engaged in the critical work of spiritual identity development for ourselves and our students during the critical years of emerging adulthood.

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Appendices
Appendix A: Consent Form

Research Participant Consent to Participate
Student Affairs Practitioners Engaging in Conversations with Students Regarding Spirituality
Margaret (Peggy) Sarnicki, Researcher
St. Cloud State University

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of student affairs practitioners in engaging college students in conversations on spirituality in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the researcher's doctoral degree. The research instrument is one or two 60-120 minute digitally recorded interviews and accompanying field notes.

Confidentiality

I understand that my confidentiality will be upheld by implementing the following measures. The transcript of the interview, digital recordings, and interviewer's field notes will be kept in a secure location at the researcher's office. Access will only be provided to the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and to a professional transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement. The participant will have the opportunity to review and suggest revisions to the interview summary. In the final study report, each study participant will be identified through a pseudonym known only to the researcher.

Three years after the awarding of the researcher's degree, the digital recording, transcript, field notes, and other study related materials will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

I understand that I am voluntarily choosing to participate in this research study. I understand I can withdraw my participation without penalty or prejudice at any time prior to the completion of the study by notifying the researcher in writing. I understand that there are no potential risks I could experience during this study beyond the normal discomfort of discussing a topic that is considered to be personal.

Opportunity to Review

I understand that I will be given one week to review and suggest revisions to the summary of any interview I participate in during the data collection of the study.

Information, Questions, and Concerns

If I have any questions or concerns, or should I wish to have additional information about this research project, I can contact the researcher, Margaret (Peggy) Sarnicki, at (320) 290-1269 or mlsarnicki@gmail.com. I may also contact her advisor, Dr. Steven McCullar at (320) 308-4727 or slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH, AND I AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

_____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Participant's Printed Name

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What led you to be willing to be interviewed for this study?
2. Please share your personal search for spirituality.
    - What was your experience of spirituality during your college years?
    - How do you define spirituality?
    - How does your spirituality influence your identity?
3. How do you live out your spirituality at work? Describe your comfort zone in regard to spirituality at work.
    - Do you feel you can bring your authentic self to work?
    - Explain how it is, or isn't, important to express your spirituality through your position.
4. Describe a time you felt you had a meaningful conversation with a student that included spirituality, if you had one.
    - Have you missed an opportunity to have a conversation with a student related to spirituality? If so, please elaborate.
    - What, if any, barriers keep you from having these conversations?
5. What is necessary for you to effectively engage with your students who are exploring their spirituality?
    - Does anything change when a student may have a different belief system from your own?
6. What graduate courses, conferences, books, or other professional development have you participated in on spirituality?
7. How do you perceive your supervisor/departmental colleagues feel about engaging students in conversations related to spirituality? Provide examples.
    - How do you perceive that your institution feels about student affairs staff having conversations with students about spirituality? Provide examples.
8. What else would you like to share on this topic that we have not discussed?

Appendix C: IRB Approval

ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Margaret Sarnicki

Email: sama0702@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Expedited Review-1

Project Title: Student Affairs Practitioners Conversations with Students Regarding Spiritual Identity

Advisor Steven McCullar

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology,Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 595 - 2203	**Type:** Expedited Review-1	**Today's Date:** 10/20/2017
1st Year Approval Date: 10/17/2017	**2nd Year Approval Date:**	**3rd Year Approval Date:**
1st Year Expiration Date: 10/16/2017	**2nd Year Expiration Date:**	**3rd Year Expiration Date:**